

BRĀHMAṆAS, PĀÑCARĀTRINS,
AND THE FORMATION OF ŚRĪVAIṢṆAVISM

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INTRODUCTION¹

Controversy still surrounds the identity of the Ālvārs. At one time, they were considered lower caste.² FRIEDHELM HARDY challenged this thesis by arguing that they had a strong elite component as indicated by their use of the terms *kō*, *kōṇ* (which mean head/chief/king), and *ālvār* (noble person/saint).³ Some of them (such as Toṇṭaraṭippoṭi, Periyālvār, and his daughter Āṇṭāl) were Brāhmaṇas according to the hymns themselves; others (such as Kulacēkaraṇ and Tirumaṅkai) might have been chiefs. Whatever their social identity, these *bhakti* poet-saints developed a distinct religious identity based on Tamil hymns with early *caṅkam* poetic tropes; a northern deity (Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa⁴); and concepts of refuge and service.⁵ How that happened remains obscure.

¹ I would like to thank LESLIE ORR for generously showing me her published and unpublished work on South Indian inscriptions and discussing several drafts of this essay. I am indebted to her recognition of the historical patterns and changes suggested by these inscriptions. Although my analysis builds on these, I have introduced my own interpretations of how they might be linked with the formation of Śrīvaiṣṇavism. MARION RASTELLI, too, has facilitated my thinking by correcting some misperceptions I had of early Pāñcarātra texts, drawing my attention to some important sources, and challenging me to think more about some of my positions.

² NARAYANAN/VELUTHAT 1978.

³ HARDY 1983: 250-255.

⁴ Murukaṇ had been the main Tamil deity before the *bhakti* period. We have some scattered references to other northern deities, however, including Kṛṣṇa (known as Māyōṇ), Nārāyaṇa, and Śiva (Civaṇ) from late *caṅkam* times.

⁵ The same could be said for the Nāyaṇmārs, poet-saints who worshipped Civaṇ (Śiva); this was a parallel movement, even more popular in Tamilnadu, and demands a separate study to detect similarities to and differences from the Ālvārs.

Controversy still surrounds the Pāñcarātrins, too, in Tamilnadu. Scholars have generally assumed that they were priests in the temples that are mentioned in Ālvār hymns or that some Ālvārs themselves were Pāñcarātrins, but concrete evidence for those theories is meager. In fact, the role of Pāñcarātrins in Tamilnadu is obscure, with virtually no inscriptional evidence about them as temple priests, let alone a well-institutionalized priesthood, between the seventh century and the fifteenth.

Finally, controversy still surrounds the early Ācāryas. Were they a different Brāhmaṇa group altogether from those associated with the Ālvārs? Did they have Pāñcarātra connections? In this paper, I will try to clarify relations between Brāhmaṇas, including some of the specific Brahmanical groups likely involved in the Ālvār tradition, and Pāñcarātrins in connection with the formation of Śrīvaiṣṇavism (and its philosophical counterpart, Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta).

In the first part, I will present diagnostic features that characterize religious aspects of Śrīvaiṣṇavism from the Ālvārs to Rāmānuja: (1) accepting Nārāyaṇa as the sole supreme deity, one with many names and forms, (2) surrendering and taking refuge, (3) making God fully present by the devotee's "command," (4) mentally and physically seeing God, (5) worshipping and serving, (6) singing *stotras* to attain mundane and supramundane goals, and (7) integrating Sanskrit and Tamil traditions. In the second part, I will revisit the diagnostic markers that scholars have used to identify Pāñcarātrins as central to Ālvār temple culture. But these lack specificity, predate the Ālvārs, and are found in non-Pāñcarātra texts. This opens the door for consideration, in part three, of other possible influences on the Ālvārs – Atharvavedic, Yajurvedic, Ṛgvedic, and Mahāyāna Buddhist. In the fourth section, I will focus on references to Pāñcarātra in the works of early Ācāryas – especially Yāmuna's Āgamaprāmāṇya, a text that defends Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas who have become involved in Pāñcarātra temple ritual. And I will examine inscriptions for clues to the formation of Śrīvaiṣṇavism. Throughout these discussions, I will pay special attention to the varied understandings of image worship, because these are central to the formation of religious identity.

My Tamil sources include early works, called *caṅkam*, which were written between the first century BCE and the third CE; transitional ones, which were written between the fourth century and the sixth; and *bhakti* hymns of the Ālvārs, which were written between the seventh and ninth. In Sanskrit, major sources include the Vāstu-

sūtra-Upaniṣad, the Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra, the Ṛgvidhāna with its Puruṣasūktavidhāna – all of which were written between the fourth century and the sixth – and the works of Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas (along with Maṇipravāla ones), which were written between the eleventh and the fifteenth.

I: THE DIAGNOSTIC FEATURES OF RELIGIOUS ŚRĪVAIṢṆAVISM

A set of diagnostic features is a generalization based on the clustering of traits that are detected by systematic examination of a phenomenon (here, the religious orientation named Śrīvaiṣṇavism). By identifying a set of commonalities but noting that all need not appear in any given example, I will define a “family of resemblances,” a concept first introduced by LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN. I will use this hypothetical aggregate as a provisional definition of Śrīvaiṣṇava religious identity. Because my perspective in this chapter covers many centuries, I will have to do without extensive discussions of the varieties, complexities, and anomalies of individual texts.

Nārāyaṇa as the Sole Supreme Deity with Many Names and Forms

This identification of the most important Ālvār deity has gone unnoticed due to the popularity of Kṛṣṇa and many other names or forms associated with the semantic field of pan-Indian Vaiṣṇavism. Ālvār references to local names and epithets in Tamil have contributed to this obscurity. Careful examination of the hymns, however, reveals that most names used by the Ālvārs for this supreme deity connote his dark colour: Māyōṇ/Tirumāl, Māyāvaṇ, Māyāppiraṇ, Māyaṇ, Māṇikkam, Maṇivaṇṇaṇ, Mukilvaṇṇaṇ, Kārvaṇṇaṇ, Kaṭalvaṇṇaṇ, Kāyāpūvaṇṇaṇ, Nīrvaṇṇaṇ, and Koṇṭalvaṇṇaṇ. These occur hundreds of times – Māyōṇ/Tirumāl alone, for instance, 334 times. The reference to dark colour can refer to Kṛṣṇa; the Tamil equivalent Kaṇṇaṇ occurs 219 times, Hari 14 times, and Vāsudeva 11 times.⁶ The deity of dark colour can refer also to Viṣṇu. The Tamil orthographic equivalent of Viṣṇu occurs 3 times along with his *avatāras* such as Rāma (21 times), Vāmana (23 times), and Trivikrama (7

⁶ These statistics are based on the catalogue of references to names and epithets in the Divyaprabhandam, found in NARAYANAN 1987: 166-169.

times). But many of these references to the dark deity indicate Nārāyaṇa; they refer to the one with the colour of the ocean, say, or the characteristic reclining posture of this deity. Whether the Ālvārs favoured Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu, or Nārāyaṇa as the predominant “dark deity” might provide a clue to their sectarian identity. I find this clue in *mantras* that they mentioned.⁷

1. *namo nāraṇa*:

Poykaiyālvār: Mutal-tiruvantāti 57, 95

Periyālvār: Periyālvār-tirumoli 4.5.2; 5.1.3; 5.1.6

2. *namo nārāyaṇa*:

Periyālvār: Tiruppallāṇṭu 3, 10, 11

Poykaiyālvār: Mutal-tiruvantāti 91

3. *namo nārāyaṇāya*:

Periyālvār: Tiruppallāṇṭu 4; 12

Āṇṭāl: Nācciyār-tirumoli 5.11

4. *tiruveṭṭu eluttu*:

Tirumaḷicai: Tiruccanta-viruttam 77, 78

Tirumaṅkaiyālvār: Periya-tirumoli 1.8.9; 5.8.9; 6.6.9; 6.10.1; 8.10.3

Periyālvār: Periyālvār-tirumoli

The name Nāraṇa, I think, is an abbreviated version of Nārāyaṇa. As a five-syllable *mantra*, it would parallel the popular five-syllable *namo śivāya*.⁸ The dative case is used in version three of the

⁷ All references to the Ālvārs are from the Tamil text Nālāyirativyap-pirapantam (Nāl) unless otherwise noted.

⁸ A key *stotra* of the Taittirīya tradition, from the Yajurveda, is the Śatarudrīya (the hundred names of Rudra). Along with the five-syllable *mantra* that it contains – *namo śivāya* – it became extremely important in later Tamil Śaivism and was closely connected with the important ritual of bathing the image (*abhiṣekha*). These connections are intriguing, because the Viṣṇusahasranāma (the thousand names of Viṣṇu) found in the Mahābhārata and thought to be modeled on the Śatarudrīya, had considerable influence on Tamil Vaiṣṇavism – as did the five-syllable *mantra* *namo nāraṇa*. The shortened form of the name Nārāyaṇa was created, I think, to fit the need for a five-syllable *mantra* to parallel the Śaiva one. The Taittirīya tradition worshipped both Śiva and Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa (along with several other deities). See discussion in the Yajurveda section below.

mantra, which is merely a grammatical variation (salutations to Nārāyaṇa) of the second version. Even the fourth version refers to Nārāyaṇa, because it is Tamil for the “sacred eight syllables.” The latter term refers to the *tirumantra* (*om namo nārāyaṇāya*). But it is an allusion, because the *mantra* contains the sacred Vedic syllable “om,”⁹ which should not be uttered in public. It is striking that these *mantras* use or allude to only the names Nāraṇa and Nārāyaṇa, even though the hymns themselves use many other names and epithets.

A study of the Ālvār hymns suggests that some of the most popular temples were Nārāyaṇa ones. All of the Ālvārs refer to Śrīraṅgam, and they do so more often than to any other temple. The Tiruveḥka shrine in Kāñcī was popular with the early Ālvārs. The city of Kāñcī was the third most popular place, in fact, when you consider all hymns about its many temples. Tirumāliruñcōlai was the fourth most popular place by count.¹⁰ Nārāyaṇa was the main image in all these places. I assume this, because it is described as reclining, and that is the characteristic form of Nārāyaṇa. In addition, many epithets associate him with the ocean of milk or other cosmogonic imagery. And the images in these temples today are those of Nārāyaṇa. At the same time, it is important to note that this Nārāyaṇa tradition integrated all the names and forms of Viṣṇu, including his *avatāras*; integration was characteristic of regions to the north of Tamilnadu between the third century and the sixth. Along with Nārāyaṇa, Kṛṣṇa is highlighted in the Ālvār hymns – no doubt because of his early presence in the region of Maturai and references to him in *caṅkam* literature.¹¹

The Ālvār emphasis on Nārāyaṇa continued with the early Ācāryas. Nārāyaṇa was often a synonym for *brahman*. In his commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*, Yāmuna says: “It is the doctrine expounded by the *Bhagavadgītā* that Nārāyaṇa, who is the Supreme Brahman, can only be attained by means of *bhakti* which is brought

⁹ YOUNG 2002: 84-121.

¹⁰ The later tradition claimed that Tirunārāyaṇapuram, in what is now Karnataka, was the fourth most popular place. But if you actually count the number of hymns that mention places, the fourth is Tirumāliruñcōlai.

¹¹ See HARDY for a discussion of several *caṅkam* allusions to Māyōṇ as Kṛṣṇa and possible links of the name Pāñṭiya with Pāṇḍava, and Maturai with Mathurā (HARDY 1983: 151; 155-156).

about by observance of the dharma, acquisition of knowledge and renunciation of passion.”¹² In his *Stotraratna*, he first mentions the deity’s name in verse 11: “O Nārāyaṇa, which knower of the Vedas does not admit your real nature (*svabhāva*) endowed with unsurpassable excellences...”¹³ The *Āgamaprāmāṇya* attributed to him, however, refers usually to Viṣṇu.

Rāmānuja frequently identified *brahman* with Nārāyaṇa. Consider the following: “He is the internal self of all beings, is devoid of sins, is the divine lord, the one Nārāyaṇa. By the Subāla [Upaniṣad 7.1] statement, it is clearly declared that all *tattvas* are the body of the supreme soul.”¹⁴ In addition, the *Śrīraṅgagadya* (of disputed authorship but in my estimation a genuine work, probably written late in his life¹⁵) expresses the unequivocal identity of the supreme *brahman* (*parabrahman*), the supreme person (*puruṣottama*), and the one who is reclining at Śrīraṅgam – that is, Nārāyaṇa as Raṅganātha. According to JOHN CARMAN, “It is one of Rāmānuja’s constant polemical objectives to establish that this Supreme Brahman defined in the Upaniṣads is none other than Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. I must prove two main propositions: (1) that the one ultimate principle or reality of the Vedānta is the personal Lord, and (2) that the proper name of the Lord is Nārāyaṇa. We can arrange the four most significant names in an order of increasing specificity: Brahman, Puruṣottama, Bhagavān, and Nārāyaṇa.”¹⁶ J.A.B. VAN BUITENEN notes that Rāmānuja rarely uses the name Vāsudeva: “When it occurs in the texts

¹² VAN BUITENEN 1953: 179.

¹³ *Stotraratna* 11ab: *svābhāvikaṁ avadhikātiśayeśitṛtvaṁ nārāyaṇa tvayi na mṛsyati vaidikaḥ kaḥ* |. All references to the *stotras* of the Ācāryas are from *Stotramālā*.

¹⁴ Śrībh I, 225,5f.: ... *eṣa sarvabhūtāntarātmā apahatapāpmā divyo deva eko nārāyaṇa iti subālaśrutyā sarvatattvānām paramātmāsarīratvaṁ spaṣṭam abhidhīyate*.

¹⁵ For discussions about Rāmānuja’s authorship of the *Gadyas*, see CARMAN 1974: 212-223; VENKATACHARI 1978: 97-102; LIPNER 1986: 116-117, and CARMAN/NARAYANAN 1989: 42. See also my discussion later in this essay.

¹⁶ CARMAN 1974: 159.

he comments upon, it is translated into Nārāyaṇa, which is his favourite name for God.”¹⁷

The first reference to *mantras* by the Ācāryas appears in Rāmānuja’s Śaraṇāgatigadya, which mentions the word *dvayam* (pair). He alludes, no doubt, to *śrīmannārāyaṇacarāṇau śaraṇam prapadye* and *śrimate nārāyaṇāya namaḥ*, which were explicitly identified as the *dvayam* in later times. And the Nityagrantha, a work attributed to him but of disputed authorship, mentions recitation of the *mūlamantra* (the *tirumantra*: *om namo nārāyaṇāya*) while bathing or performing *pūjā*. After Rāmānuja, these – along with the Caramaśloka from BhG 18.66 – became important and were the subject of many commentaries and treatises, beginning with Parāśarabhaṭṭar’s Aṣṭaślokī. This suggests that the sect continued to define its identity primarily by Nārāyaṇa rather than Vāsudeva, Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, or some other form of the deity – even though the Caramaśloka refers indirectly to Kṛṣṇa and the Āgamaprāmāṇya attributed to Yāmuna mainly to Viṣṇu.

By contrast, the Pāñcarātra texts contain many *mantras*. The earliest reference to the *tirumantra* might be in the Sanatkumārasaṃhitā¹⁸ or the Lakṣmīmantra,¹⁹ but that awaits further investigation.

¹⁷ VAN BUITENEN 1953: 290.

¹⁸ This suggestion was made by RASTELLI: personal communication. In addition, she provided the following information on Pāñcarātra *mantras*: A list of the *mantras* of the Jayākhyasaṃhitā is included in the introduction to the published text. The *mūlamantra* of the Jayākhyasaṃhitā is *om kṣīm kṣih namaḥ*, and the *mūrtimantra* belonging to it is *nārāyaṇāya viśvātmane hrīm svāhā*. The list includes additional *mantras* but not the ones that the Ālvārs cited. Similarly, the *mantras* of the Sātvatasaṃhitā, furnished by RASTELLI, contain none of the Nārāyaṇa *mantras* that I have discussed. The earliest Pāñcarātra reference to the *aṣṭākṣara* (the eight-syllabled *mantra*, i.e., the *mantra om namo nārāyaṇāya*) could be SanS *brahmarātra* 9.10c-11b and the earliest reference to the *dvādaśākṣaramantra om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya* could be SanS *brahmarātra* 9.10c-11b.

¹⁹ LT 17.19ff. and 24.68-74 cited by MUMME 1987b: 10.

Surrender and Refuge

The theme of refuge runs through the Ālvār hymns²⁰ and the works of the early Ācāryas.²¹ As Nammālvār observed, “He is our father and mother, becoming our [refuge] ...”²² Yāmuna referred several times to taking refuge or shelter (*āsrita*) with God, as in this passage: “You are [my] father, mother, beloved son, dear friend, confident, preceptor and refuge of the worlds.”²³ In his commentary on BhG 4.11,²⁴ Rāmānuja interpreted *prapadyante* (which denotes approach) as *samāśrayante* (which connotes “take refuge with”). He thereby provided scope for linking the Gītā expression *prapadyante* with the popular Ālvār phrase “taking refuge in” (*aṭaikkalam*). Like the Ālvārs, but unlike his own disciples and the later Ācāryas, he did not refer to the technical word *prapatti*, only to the linguistically related verb *prapadyante*. His Śaraṇāgatigadya describes his surrender to the mercy of Śrī and requests her blessing as he surrenders to the Lord. And his Śrīraṅgagadya describes his desire to become an eternal servant of Lord Raṅganātha (Nārāyaṇa).²⁵ The themes of surrender and refuge are often connected with unworthiness and utter destitution: Kulacēkarālvār says, “O Lord who dwells in Vittuvakkoṭu, surrounded by fragrant flower gardens. Even if you remain without removing my ills given by you, I have no other refuge. I am in the position of a child who continues to cry and hope for its mother’s kindness even if she becomes angry with him and seems to despise

²⁰ For instance, Tirumaṅkai, Periya-tirumoli 8.10.4; Periyālvār, Periyālvār-tirumoli 4.2.6; 5.3.4; and Āṇṭāl, Nācciyār-tirumoli 9.4.

²¹ CARMAN/NARAYANAN 1989: 45-55 for documentation of the themes of refuge (*śaraṇa*), submission, surrender, and sinfulness in Śrīvaiṣṇavism. In addition, see NARAYANAN 1987: 55-57, 62, 66, 88-89, 93, 97, 99, 100-101, 104-105, 111, 123, 125-127, 130, 138-139, 147-148, 189, 216; NAYAR 1992: 239, 125-127, 129, 67; VENKATACHARI 1978: 98-101; HOPKINS 2002: 8, 21-22, 235-236, 239, 241.

²² TVM 3.6.9: ... *taṅcam ākiya tantai tāy*.

²³ StR 60ab: *pitā tvaṃ mātā tvaṃ dayitatanayas tvaṃ priyasuhṛt tvaṃ eva tvaṃ mītraṃ gurur asi gatiś cāsi jagatām* |; see also StR 10.

²⁴ The following discussion is from YOUNG 1978: 150-155; 289-293.

²⁵ CARMAN 1974: 62; CARMAN/NARAYANAN 1989: 54.

him.”²⁶ Yāmuna makes a similar point but in a Brahmanical and Vedāntic idiom: “O Thou worthy of being sought as refuge! I am not one established in dharma, nor am I a knower of the self! I have no fervent devotion for Thy lotus feet; utterly destitute and having no one else for resort, I take refuge under Thy feet.”²⁷

In his Śaraṇāgatigadya, Rāmānuja, too, prays for the forgiveness of his many sins. In his Śrīraṅgagadya, moreover, he admits that “he does not deserve the privilege of service that he has requested, since he is unable to practice *bhaktiyoga* and possesses no other good quality. Therefore he takes refuge at Nārāyaṇa’s lotus feet.”²⁸ Rāmānuja’s disciples developed the themes of surrender and refuge in their commentaries on the Ālṅvār hymns and their other works.²⁹

God’s Full Presence by the Devotee’s “Command”

The supreme Nārāyaṇa graciously shows himself fully in his image incarnation however and whenever the *devotee* desires in order to provide accessibility. *bhakti* poets presented pen-sketches of deities as if alluding to paintings or statues, but they provided few specific details of these “visions” – they often move from one iconic form to another³⁰ – and few technical terms.³¹ Several important

²⁶ *taru tuyaram taṭāyēlē |*
uṇ caraṇ allāl caraṇ illai ||
virai kuḷuvūm malarṇ peralil cūl |
vittuvakkōttu ammāṇē ||
ari cinattāl inra tāy |
akarriṭṭinum marṇu avalṭan ||
aruḷ niṇaintē aḷum kuḷavi |
atuvē pōṇru iruntēṇē || (Perumāḷ-tirumoli 5.1).

²⁷ StR 22: *na dharmaniṣṭho ’smi na cātmavedī na bhaktimāṃs tvaccara-
 ṇāravinde | akiñcano ’nanyagatiś śaraṇya tvatpādamūlaṃ śaraṇaṃ pra-
 padye ||*; translated by DHAVAMONY 1994: 67.

²⁸ CARMAN/NARAYANAN 1989: 54.

²⁹ CARMAN/NARAYANAN 1989: 116-120, 133-136; NAYAR 1992: 95, 125, 127.

³⁰ Sometimes, according to detailed internal evidence, the Ālṅvārs actually visited the places that they described. At other times, though, they described them in formulaic ways. This suggests that they did not know

passages, however, include more technical descriptions of images. Here is one from the earliest Ālvār, Poykai: “Some praising (*etti*) him according to their understanding, others calling out ‘our Lord’ (*em perumān*), drawing (*cārttutal*) him on the wall or placing (*vaittu*) [him as statue], they worship (*toḷuvar*). That very form (*uruve*) is primordial (*mutal*) and is the [same] form (*mūrtti*) that measures the universe.”³²

This stanza suggests that the devotees are important, not temple priests. It implies that devotees should not only conduct worship but also make and place the image. The final statement provides the image’s ontological status: it is primordial, not merely a material object; as such, it can be understood as a full incarnation of the deity. The same Ālvār illustrates these points in the following stanza: “Whatever form (*uruvam*) they enjoy with deep affection (*ukantu*), he himself becomes that form (*uruvam*). Whatever name (*pēr*) they desire, he himself becomes that name. Whatever colour (*vaṇṇam*) they think about constantly, the one who bears the discus will become that colour (*vaṇṇam*).”³³

Again, this stanza suggests that devotees – not priests – decide the form, name, and color of the image. They choose on the basis of enjoyment: “with deep affection” (*ukantu*). The same stanza comments on the ontological status of forms desired by devotees. Indian philosophy often refers to material objects as *nāmarūpa* (name and form). Here, the poet uses the Tamil equivalent, *pēruruvam*, thereby indicating that the object offered has name and form – and therefore might be an ordinary material object. But this is qualified immediately. If devotees offer it with deep affection or focus their minds on

these places first-hand (YOUNG 1978: 329-340). See also RICHARD DAVIS’s idea of the “Devotional Eye” (DAVIS 1997: 23, 28).

³¹ This discussion is based on YOUNG 1978: 150-152.

³² *avaravartāntām arintavarētti |*
ivarivarempērumānenru cuvarmiccai ||
cārttutal vaittum toḷuvar ulakaḷanta |
mūrttiyuruvēmūtal || (Poykaiyālvār, Mutal-tiruvantāti 14).

³³ *tamarukantatevvuruvam avvuruvam tānē |*
tamarukantateppērmarrappēr tamarukantu ||
evvaṇṇaṁcintittimaiyātirupparē |
avvaṇṇamāliyāṇam || (Poykaiyālvār, Mutal-tiruvantāti 44)

it, as if in meditation, God *himself* becomes that very form. Listen to Nammālvār: “O people of the world, don’t be afraid and doubt whether he is this one or that one. Whatever one thinks in one’s heart, that he becomes! He is our refuge! Our father and mother! Yet not like them too! Primordial among the three who are first in the family of flawless deities.”³⁴

This stanza, too, refers to the ontological problem of how people can accept the idea that a lifeless, material object is the supreme god of the universe.³⁵ The poet tries to remove doubts by affirming that this one or that one is the supreme god. This idea, that the supreme deity can be fully present in what appears to be mere material objects, is the strongest ontological statement possible for the status of the material image as the very incarnation of God. It reverses the usual relationship between deity and devotee, moreover, because the devotee can now command the deity’s form of presentation, as it were, thanks to the latter’s graciousness.

This presents an intriguing problem. One would think that words for the image would be Tamil, but they are all Sanskrit – *uruvam* (*rūpa*), *vaṇṇam* (*varṇa*), and *mūrtti* (*mūrti*).³⁶ This suggests that these authors might have drawn from a Brahmanical or at least northern tradition of image worship, not a Tamil and non-Brahmanical

³⁴ *tañcam ākiya tantai tāy oṭu |*
tānum āy avai allāṇay ||
eñcalil amarar kulamutal |
mūvar tam muḷḷum ātiyai ||
añci nīr ulakattatuḷḷirkaḷ |
avanivaṇ enru kūl ēṇ min ||
neñcināl nīṇaippāṇ |
evaṇ avan akum nīḷ kaṭal vaṇṇane || (Nammālvār, Tīruvāymoli 3.6.9).

³⁵ HARDY 1983: 543.

³⁶ *uravam* is the Tamil orthographic form of the Sanskrit word *rūpa*: shape, visible form, beauty, colour, image made of clay or brick, and statue. *vaṇṇam* is the Tamil orthographic equivalent of the Sanskrit word *varṇa*: colour, natural beauty, decoration, nature, character, virtue, form, figure, caste, and manner. And *mūrtti* is the orthographic equivalent of the Sanskrit word *mūrti*. It denotes any solid body or material form made by human beings, an embodiment, a manifestation, an incarnation, a personification; therefore, it connotes anything with definite shape or limits – such as an image or statue.

one. We have little evidence in any case of statues of Tamil deities before the time of the Ālvārs. Murukan, the main Tamil deity during the *caṅkam* period, was represented by a post, tree, or mountain, and only a few Tamil texts allude to statues.

I turn now to the Ācāryas. In his ninth lecture on the Bhagavad-gītā, Yāmuna “treats of the eminence of God and his divine superiority in human embodiment, of the excellent character of the *mahāt-mans* and of the bhaktiyoga.”³⁷ And in the eleventh, he “describes the immediate presentation of God and teaches that the quiddity of God can only by bhakti be known and attained.”³⁸ These two comments are terse but allude, I think, to the human incarnation (*avatāra*) and the image incarnation (the “immediate presentation”) of God respectively. Both forms, according to Yāmuna, reveal the deity’s divine superiority – that is, his real nature as fully divine. This is the same ontology that the Ālvārs describe.

Rāmānuja had far more to say about image worship than Yāmuna did. Because this fact has been ignored by scholars,³⁹ I will

³⁷ VAN BUITENEN 1953: 180.

³⁸ VAN BUITENEN 1953: 180.

³⁹ Contrary to the conviction of Śrīvaiṣṇavas, ROBERT LESTER has argued that Rāmānuja represented a break in the development of Śrīvaiṣṇavism. He wonders why “worship of the image form of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, so important in the Ālvārs’ hymns and *Pāñcarātra Āgamas*, ‘finds very little commendation in the writings of Rāmānuja’” (CARMAN 1974: 231; citing LESTER). The absence of any reference to the *arcā* is a case in point. Although he does not accept LESTER’s whole thesis, JOHN CARMAN wonders why “Rāmānuja has nowhere mentioned the concept of *arcā* specifically” (CARMAN 1974: 181). And in his discussion of Rāmānuja’s theology, JULIUS LIPNER makes no reference at all to the important problem of image worship. He prefers to stay with the explicit meaning of Rāmānuja’s commentary on texts such as the Bhagavadgītā. Even in his discussion of whether we can attribute the Gadyas to Rāmānuja (and he has serious reservations), LIPNER avoids the image form and thus dismisses its significance for Rāmānuja (LIPNER 1986: 116f.).

It could be argued, however, that Rāmānuja cleverly created scope for a theology of the image but did so cryptically. Why? Because he wanted to lay the Vedāntic foundation for *bhakti* in a way that would appeal to orthodox Brāhmaṇas. This was necessary because of a debate in Brahmanical circles over the legitimacy of temple worship and the Vedic basis of texts

discuss it in some detail.⁴⁰ Rāmānuja's main contribution to this topic is his commentary on Bhagavadgītā 4.11. This verse might have been one inspiration for the Ālvārs, in fact, given their other references to the Bhagavadgītā. If so, then it would have provided Rāmānuja with an opportunity to make this connection in his commentary – albeit indirectly in deference to his task of establishing Vedāntic foundations for *bhakti*. At the outset, I should note the importance of the Gītā for Rāmānuja. He quotes it 140 times in the Śrībhāṣya.⁴¹ Here, then, is the verse to be discussed: “Those who approach (*prapadyan-*

such as the Pāñcarātra. Indeed, this problem of Rāmānuja's lack of explicit reference to image worship was non-existent until historical criticism was superficially applied to the texts. The lesson to be learned from this exercise is that the absence of a technical term need not mean absence of a concept, especially if the author has a motive for avoiding the term.

Another explanation for the lack of explicit references to image worship in his Śrībhāṣya is that Rāmānuja, even though he had many connections with the temple culture, became personally more devotional only later in life, the time when he probably composed the Gadyas and wrote his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā. In these works, Rāmānuja evokes the mood of enjoyment (*bhoga*). HARDY (1983: 480; 581) has suggested that the Ācāryas removed the emotional component of Ālvār tradition altogether, but NAYAR has challenged that view. Although the Ācāryas incorporated the Sanskritic, intellectual tradition to establish *ubhayavedānta* (both *vedāntas*, both Sanskrit and Tamil scriptural traditions), they nonetheless had deeply emotional relationships with God. They expressed these especially in their Sanskrit *stotras*, hymns of praise that drew on Ālvār emotionalism (see NAYAR 1992: 10-13; 259; NAYAR 1994: 186-221).

The ease with which his very own disciples discuss image worship in temples suggests that at the very least, he did not disapprove of it. Surely, tension would be evident somewhere in the Śrīvaiṣṇava literature if Rāmānuja had disapproved of image worship in temples.

⁴⁰ YOUNG 1978: 150-155.

⁴¹ VAN BUITENEN comments that Rāmānuja, in his Gītābhāṣya, readily “enlarges upon the devotional passages of the Gītā and then his style often approaches that of the ardent devotee who glorifies his God in fervid litanies. More than in his other works it is here the priest of the temple of Śrīraṅga who rises before our minds in the prose hymns of many passages” (VAN BUITENEN 1953: 18). I doubt that Rāmānuja was a priest at Śrīraṅgam (see discussion of priesthood later in this chapter). But he might well have been a devotee, at least late in life.

te) me in whatever way, in the same way I reach them. People follow my path, O Pārtha, in every way.”⁴²

Rāmānuja comments on it as follows: “Not only having incarnated in the form of gods, men, and so forth, do I give protection to those who desire refuge in me (*matsamāśrayaṇāpekṣāṇām*), but also I show myself (*mām darśayāmi*) to those who desirous of my refuge, having portrayed me in their imagination (*saṃkalpya*) in whatever way (*yathā*) according to their own desire, seek refuge in me. There is no need to say more. All people, with the sole desire of following me – having experienced (*anubhūya*) my own nature (*svabhāva*), which is imperceptible even to the *yogins* by means of speech and mind through their own sense organs such as eyes, and so on, in every way desired by them – follow me.”⁴³

This commentary is important as a transition from the concept of incarnation in the form of gods, men, and so on – *vibhava*, which is to say, *avatāra* – to that of the “image,” a transition that parallels Yāmuna’s commentary. Neither word is found in BhG 4.4-11. Nonetheless, the context furnishes scope for the introduction and elaboration of these two key concepts.⁴⁴

⁴² *ye yathā mām prapadyante tāṃs tathaiva bhajāmy aham | mama vartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ ||* (BhG 4.11).

⁴³ *na kevalaṃ devamānuṣyādirūpeṇāvatīrya matsamāśrayaṇāpekṣā-ṇām paritrāṇaṃ karomi. api tu ye matsamāśrayaṇāpekṣā mām yathā yena prakāreṇa svāpekṣānurūpaṃ maṃ saṃkalpya prapadyante samāśrayante; tān prati tathaiva tanmanīṣitaprakāreṇa bhajāmi mām darśayāmi. kim atra bahunā. sarve manuṣyāḥ madānuvartanaikāmanorathā mama vartma mat-svabhāvaṃ sarvaṃ yogināṃ vānmanasāgocaram api svakīyaś cakṣurādi-karaṇais sarvaśas svāpekṣitais sarvaprakārair anubhūyānuvartante* (GBh 138,3-7).

⁴⁴ In his commentary on BhG 4.4ff. (this discussion is based on YOUNG 1978: 289-291), Rāmānuja cleverly introduces the Vaiṣṇava concept of *vibhava* (*avatāra*). An allusion to the *birth of the Supreme God* in 4.6 gives Rāmānuja an opportunity to bring out conceptual nuances in *vi-bhava*. Glossing the line, “I am born by my own *māyā*,” he converts ordinary expressions into sectarian ones. His gloss is important: *prakṛti* is *svabhāva* is *svam eva svabhāvaṃ adhiṣṭhāya* is *svena rūpeṇa*. *prakṛti* usually means matter consisting of the three *guṇas* that are characteristic of *saṃ-sāra*. BhG 4.6 could be interpreted as the Lord’s birth with *prakṛti* as his

temporary receptacle (*adhiṣṭhāna*), which implies that *prakṛti* is not transformed because of his presence but rather remains physical matter.

But Rāmānuja explicitly replaces the common denotation of *prakṛti* as “matter” with “God’s own essential nature” (*svabhāva*) – that is, “depending on his very own essential nature” (*svam eva svabhāvam adhiṣṭhāya*) or “by his own form” (*svena rūpeṇa*). Subtly explicating *vibhava*, he describes *saṁsthāna* as the shape, plan, or blueprint. God already has his own form but adjusts himself to the shape of gods, men, and so on, by his own will. To do that, he does not share material nature with other human beings (*puruṣas*) but uses his own essential nature (*svabhāva*) when “born.”

BhG 4.7 defines the time of birth as whenever there is a decline of righteousness (*dharma*) and the emergence of unrighteousness (*adharma*). In Rāmānuja’s comment on BhG 4.8, which describes the purpose of God’s birth – to protect good people – he interprets “good people” as “prominent Vaiṣṇavas.” Taking this opportunity to emphasize God’s visibility and accessibility through incarnation (*avatāra*), he says that God comes into the world for those who are not able to bear and nourish their own person without his *darśana*. *darśana* occurs by means of accessibility to his name, action, and form through speech and mind. This grants the devotees his form, actions, vision, speech, and so on, for their protection, for the destruction of those who are contrary to them, and for the establishment of the Vedic *dharma* – which is of the nature of the worship of him – by exhibiting his worshipful form (*ārādhya svarūpa*).

Once again, in BhG 4.9, Rāmānuja affirms that God’s birth is unique (*asādhāraṇa*), non-material (*aprākṛta*), and thus divine (*divya*). A few centuries later, Vedāntadeśika would use the full scope of Rāmānuja’s Vaiṣṇava- and Ālṅvār-nuanced commentary on BhG 4.6: God’s nature (*prakṛti*) is his *svabhāva*, which is his body (*vigraha*), his divine body (*divyavigraha*), his non-material (*aprākṛta*) body.

Rāmānuja’s interpretation of BhG 4.6 describes, although it does not name, the category of *vibhava* (*avatāra*). God protects those who take refuge in him; he shows himself to them; and he allows his entire nature (*svabhāva*) to be experienced by the ordinary physical eyes of those who follow him. The description of God’s birth in BhG 4.11, which does not name as the image-incarnation (*arcā*), parallels the description in verse 4.6. Because of these similarities between BhG 4.6 and 4.11, later Ācāryas have often made *vibhava* an inclusive category for *avatāra*, *arcā*, and *antaryāmin*. But Rāmānuja points out significant differences between BhG 4.6 and 4.11. This is most important here. The latter verse is addressed to a second group of people under a second set of conditions: “Those who seek my protection *after they have portrayed me in [their] imagination*” and “I show myself ... in the form that is *desired by them* ...” In contrast, God conforms himself to

How did Rāmānuja introduce the image-incarnation and its nuances? BhG 4.11 itself contains ideas that contributed to both. It is no surprise, then, that Rāmānuja recognizes the significance of this verse, which appropriately follows the discussion on God's incarnation (BhG 4.4-10). He selects significant components of the verse to provide scope for the image-incarnation, extends their semantics, enhances their theological application, fills in conceptual gaps, and thereby presents a harmonious exposition of the concept. In his commentary on BhG 4.11, Rāmānuja presents ten theological concepts that can be detected in Ālvār poetry: (1) God shows himself as the image incarnation; (2) the image-incarnation is fully God; (3) the devotee initiates the transformation, which is then done directly by God; (4) God provides accessibility as the image-incarnation, so the appearance of God is unrestricted by time, space, and eligibility; (5) God displays noblesse oblige in the sense that he graciously accepts whatever name and form the devotees offer; (6) mutuality or reversal characterize the relationship between God and devotee; and (7) the salvific means (*upāya*) and goal (*upeya*) are identical.

Rāmānuja's sectarian perspective is evident, especially when you compare his commentary on BhG 4.11 to that of Śaṅkara.⁴⁵ For,

the shape (*saṁsthāna*) of gods, men, and so on however and whenever he wants (as in BhG 4.6).

⁴⁵ In his commentary, Śaṅkara tries to find a connection with the previous verse (this discussion is from YOUNG 1978: 291-293). He begins by posing a question that Arjuna is likely to ask, which links 4.10 with 4.11: “‘Then you [Kṛṣṇa] must have attachment and hatred, due to which you reveal yourself to some people only and not to all?’ [If this is the question], then [Kṛṣṇa] says: ‘Those who approach me in whatever manner, that is, with whatever purpose, that is, with the desire of whatever fruit, I worship them, that is, favour them in the same manner, that is, by giving them that fruit [which they wanted] because they have no desire for *mokṣa*. One cannot possibly have simultaneously the desire for *mokṣa* and the desire for fruit. Hence, I favour (1) by giving fruits to those who desire fruits; (2) by giving knowledge to those who act in the prescribed manner but have no desire for fruits, and are seekers of *mokṣa*; (3) by giving *mokṣa* to those who are knowers, renouncers, and seekers of *mokṣa*, [and] in the same manner afflicted ones by removing [their] affliction. Thus, those who approach me in whatever way, I worship them in the same manner. I surely do not worship (favour: *bhajāmi*) them because of my attachment and hatred or

Śaṅkara the word *māyā* connotes “illusion.” Rāmānuja paraphrases this word as *jñāna* (knowledge), thereby maintaining that God’s birth is *real*. For Śaṅkara, moreover, the word *prapadyante* has no philosophical or theological significance. For Rāmānuja, it expresses the key concept of surrender (*prapatti*). Rāmānuja begins with an extended analysis of *ye yathā māṃ prapadyante* (those who approach me in whatever way). Into the Gītā verse, he inserts the word *saṃkalpya* (from the verb *saṃ klp*, meaning to imagine visually, conceive of, portray in the imagination, or desire explicitly), which he interprets as *svāpekṣānurūpam* (according to their own expectation or desire). Moreover, he gives a sectarian interpretation to the correlatives *yathā ... tathaiva*.⁴⁶ Śaṅkara sees in the syntactical correlation of these adverbs of manner, namely *yathā – tathā*, the reciprocity of God and the devotee in assigned proportion. He extracts the sense of just apportionment of reward by God to the devotees’ actions. By contrast, Rāmānuja derives a sense of equality (mutuality and intimacy) through the syntax of these correlatives. By means of elaborate paraphrases or explanatory comments, he overinterprets the Gītā verse in order to develop an Ālvār standpoint. To make his commen-

infatuation. People follow the path of me, the God who is immanent in everything, in every manner. Those who endeavour with the desire of whatever fruit in the action which is legitimate for them are described here by the word *mānuṣya*, O Pārtha, in all manners (*sarvaśaḥ*).” (BhGBh 116,11-117,8: *tava tarhi rāgadveṣau staḥ, yena kebhyaścīd evātmabhāvaṃ prayacchasi na sarvebhyaḥ ity ucyate – ye yathā māṃ prapadyante tāṃs tathaiva bhajāmy aham | mama vartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ || 4.11 ye yathā yena prakāreṇa yena prayojanena yatphalārthitayā māṃ prapadyante tāṃs tathaiva tatphaladānena bhajāmy anugrhnāmy aham ity etat. teṣāṃ mokṣaṃ praty anarthitvāt. na hy ekasya mumukṣutvaṃ phalārthitvaṃ ca yugapat sambhavati. ato ye phalārthināḥ tān phalapradānena, ye yathoktakārīṇaḥ tv aphaḥlārthino mumukṣavaḥ ca tān jñānapradānena, ye jñāninaḥ saṃnyāsino mumukṣavaḥ ca tān mokṣapradānena, tathārtān ārtiharaṇena ity evaṃ yathā prapadyante ye tāṃs tathaiva bhajāmy arthaḥ. na punā rāgadveṣanimittaṃ mohanimittaṃ vā kaṃcid bhajāmi. sarvathāpi sarvāvaśthasya mameśvarasya vartma mārgam anuvartante manuṣyāḥ – yatphalārthitayā yasmin karmaṇy adhikṛtā ye prayatante te manuṣyā atra ucyante he pārtha sarvaśaḥ sarvaparakāraiḥ.*)

⁴⁶ I could not capture the correlatives in the English translation, but they are extremely important in the Sanskrit.

tary appear non-parochial and therefore attractive to orthodox Brāhmaṇas, however, he refrains from using sectarian terms. Their significance for other devotees, however, must have been obvious. Rāmānuja thus devised textual leeway for a sectarian interpretation but was careful not to appear too sectarian himself. Once Rāmānuja had provided a Sanskrit foundation for Ālvār ideas in his commentary on BhG 4.11, his immediate disciples (such as Kūreśa, Parāśarabhaṭṭar, and Piḷḷāṇ) made his position explicitly sectarian by direct appreciation of God's image in the beloved places described by the Ālvārs.⁴⁷ The first reference to the five forms of God (*para*, *vyūha*, *vibhava*, *antaryāmin*, *arcā*) – which became common – appears in Kūreśa's Varadarājastava.⁴⁸ In his commentary on Rāmānuja's commentary on BhG 4.11, Vedāntadeśika explicitly says that *svāpekṣitaiḥ* (by their own desire) refers to “*arcāvatārarūpāṇi*” (TC 138,24f.).

⁴⁷ See YOUNG 1978: 145-184.

⁴⁸ Kūreśa's Varadarājastava 18. RASTELLI (personal communication based on her forthcoming manuscript “Die Tradition des Pāñcarātra im Spiegel der Pārameśvarasaṃhitā”) points out that the earliest references to these five forms in the Saṃhitās are in Īśvarasaṃhitā and Śrīpraśnasaṃhitā: “The Īśvarasaṃhitā was certainly not written before the thirteenth century. The Śrīpraśnasaṃhitā was probably written after the Pādmasaṃhitā, perhaps at the same time as the Īśvarasaṃhitā. The Śrīpraśnasaṃhitā says that the five *mūrtis* are taught in the Upaniṣads (ŚrīprśS 2.54cd: *manmūrtayaḥ pañcadhā vadanty upaniṣatsu ca* ||). Raṅgarāmānuja and Maṇavālamāmuni give a quotation from a Viṣvaksenasaṃhitā (not the one that is edited), which says that those who know the Vedānta teach this doctrine (NySV 394,8: *mama prakārāḥ pañceti prāhur vedāntapāragāḥ* |; for Maṇavālamāmuni cf. AMALADASS 1995: 183). Because of these two passages and because the teaching does not appear in the early Saṃhitās, I think that this teaching rather comes from a Vedānta tradition and not from the Pāñcarātra. The earliest reference that I could find in a Viśiṣṭādvaita text is in Kūreśa's Varadarājastava 18. This does not mean that the early Saṃhitās do not know these five forms separately. Of course, they mention the forms *para*, *vyūha* and *vibhava*; images; and sometimes the *antaryāmin*. But they do not mention the teaching of five divine forms.”

I would add that like the early Saṃhitās, the Ālvārs, too mention the equivalent of *para* (either as Viṣṇu in Vaikuṇṭha or Nārāyaṇa reclining on the Milk Ocean), *vibhava* (which are the *avatāras*), the images, and the *antaryāmin* without using technical terms. They do not, however, refer to the *vyūha*.

Mental and Physical Seeing

Although the context is ostensibly temple-image worship, the terms used by the Ālvārs suggest mental visualization and meditation. “Whatever colour (*vaṇṇam*) they *think about constantly*,” says Poykaiyālvār, “the one who bears the discus will become that colour (*vaṇṇam*).”⁴⁹ And Nammālvār comments as follows: “Whatever one *thinks in one’s heart*, that he becomes!”⁵⁰ According to FRIEDHELM HARDY, “The following stanza similarly combines traditional *yoga* ideas with Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* and the mythical realm of Viṣṇu: ‘Those who harness in their bosoms the five senses and their objects, so that they cannot stir – the senses which are never satisfied –, will see with unwinking eyes, while darkness recedes, and they will reach the town of him who reclines on the serpent with thousand mouths.’ [1st Ant 32: Poykai] ... The actual *locus* where Kṛṣṇa abides and is realized is styled variously; most frequent are *maṇam*, *cintai*, *neñcu/neñcam*, and *uḷḷam*. The denotations seem to flow into each other, and together they demarcate an area which we would describe as ‘soul, intellect, mind, consciousness, self’. ... The process of realizing Māyōṇ in the heart is referred to by verbs like *uḷ-*, *ōr-*, *niṇai-*, all meaning to ‘to think, meditate, ponder’. Again, it is impossible to decide in each case whether ‘yoga’ is referred to in its technical sense, and thus I have treated these words indiscriminately as pointers towards (intellectual) *bhakti*. ... Thus we hear indeed: ‘he is inside those who meditate on him’, ‘those who meditate properly will see his beauty’. But on the other hand we are told that ‘constantly thinking of him’ is the *result* of experiencing him: ‘Having placed Māl into my heart, I shall never put his being there out of my mind.’”⁵¹

HARDY characterizes this ambiguity of mental and physical seeing as the juxtaposition of *bhaktiyoga* and *pūjā*. The former fuses with an emotion such as love, desire, or melting in bliss. Summariz-

⁴⁹ *tamarukantatevvuruvaṁ avvuruvaṁ tāṇē |*
tamarukantateppērmarrappēr tamarukantu ||
evvaṇṇaṁcintittimaiyātirupparē |
avvaṇṇamāliyāṇam || (Poykaiyālvār, Mutal-tiruvantāti 44)

⁵⁰ Tiruvāymoli 3.6.9: *neñcinal niṇaippāṇ evaṇ avan akum*.

⁵¹ HARDY 1983: 291-293.

ing evidence in the Ālvār poems, he concludes that “a number of possible relationships are implied in various stanzas: (a) *yoga* and *pūjā* as complementary acts ... leading to ‘seeing’; (b) meditation leading to worship ... *pūjā* leading to meditation.”⁵² HARDY suggests that this religious attitude was a new element in Tamil religion, even though the Ālvārs were otherwise “deeply Tamil, not only in their language, in their poetic style, in their mythological repertoire, and in their geographical references, but most pronouncedly in their emotional and sensuous worship...”⁵³ The overlap, he thinks, had something to do with *yoga* in the Bhagavadgītā, a text well known to the Ālvārs.⁵⁴ I agree that it had something to do with *yoga*, but I think that the Gītā was not the only source. More about this shortly.

In the meantime, it is important to examine references to *bhaktiyoga* in Yāmuna and Rāmānuja. Yāmuna’s view is linked closely with his emotional surrender to God.⁵⁵ Scholars have noted that Rāmānuja was more interested in *bhaktiyoga* than in *prapatti* as a path to salvation. In his commentary on BhG 18.66, he says that devotees must begin *bhaktiyoga* by taking “refuge in me [i.e., God] alone (*mām ekaṃ śaraṇaṃ prapadyasva*) who am supremely merciful (*paramakāruṇikam*), who am the refuge of all the people without taking into consideration their differences” (GBh 492,28f.). In his commentary on BhG 18.54, Rāmānuja places emphasis on the observance of the duties of caste and stage of life, which would be transformed by an attitude of desirelessness (*naiṣkāmyakarma*) and viewed as acts of worship. In the commentary on the next verse, he says that this leads the devotee to perceive God and completely enter into him. He elaborates on this in his commentary on 18.56: one who takes God as refuge and directs all actions to him attains through his grace the supreme goal.

In his Śrībhāṣya, Rāmānuja says that the devotee should practice meditation (*dhyāna*) in the sense of worshipful contemplation (*upāsana*), resulting in a state of steady understanding (*sthitaprajñatā*) by withdrawing the senses from their object as a tortoise does

⁵² HARDY 1983: 295.

⁵³ HARDY 1983: 308.

⁵⁴ HARDY 1983: 291.

⁵⁵ DHAVAMONY 1994: 66.

its limbs. Knowledge of the soul (*ātmajñāna*), gained through intelligence, is transformed into the living reality of direct vision (*ātmāvalokana*) and experience (*ātmānubhava*).

This mental visualization of the supreme God is described in scripture. It is a vivid and immediate experience of a specific form of the deity (such as his supreme form in *Vaikuṇṭha*).⁵⁶ Mental visualization could be fluidly connected with an image such as *Raṅganātha* in the temple at *Śrīraṅgam* as represented by *Rāmānuja*'s *Śrīraṅga-gadya* (assuming that he wrote the *Gadyas*). Seeing leads to awareness of freedom from the bonds of *saṃsāra*. Ultimately, however, it is God's grace that grants salvation. M. DHAVAMONY observes that for *Rāmānuja*, "meditation (*upāsana*) is the means to release. This is accomplished with the help of the Lord which is secured by taking refuge in the Lord."⁵⁷ In the final analysis, DHAVAMONY is "inclined to think that, although he explicitly does not propose *prapatti* as a direct means to liberation in these works, he nonetheless implies that *prapatti* is an *alternative* means to *mukti*, especially when we consider his treatment of different types of meditation (*vidyā*) for different aspirants, though all of them are meant to obtain the same goal (*mukti*)."⁵⁸

Worship and Service

Taking refuge with God was closely connected with worship and service. LESLIE ORR and I have examined the *Ālvār* hymns to detect any explicit references to rituals.⁵⁹ According to the hymns, worshippers do several things in temples. One is menial service (*kur-reval*, from the word *kurumai* for shortness or defect). This refers to cleaning the temple floor and smearing it with sandal paste, decorat-

⁵⁶ LIPNER 1986: 114-115; citing *Śrībh* 1.1.1 and *Rāmānuja*'s commentary on *BhG* 2.60. See also WOODS 1994: 44 for a discussion of the experience of the highest reality according to *Rāmānuja*'s commentary on *BhG* 1.25-47; 2.11-30; and 2.39-53 and KASSAM-HANN 1994: 377 discussing *BhG* 18.54-55; 11.39-43; 11.47.

⁵⁷ DHAVAMONY 1994: 69.

⁵⁸ DHAVAMONY 1994: 73.

⁵⁹ ORR/YOUNG 1986.

ing the doorstep of the temple, and picking and plaiting flowers – after *snāna*, according to one verse. In addition, worship involves bowing, calling out the name of the deity, offering garlands at his feet, bringing pots of water, and holding incense or lamps.⁶⁰ If temple-ritual priests existed, they are not mentioned in these poems.⁶¹ In his *Stotraratna*, Yāmuna refers to bowing,⁶² sometimes with folded hands (*añjali*), toward the Lord’s lotus feet. Doing so, he says, ends *saṃsāra* and bestows supreme bliss.⁶³ In his commentary on BhG 9.14 and 12.9, Rāmānuja mentions many acts of worship. He alludes to the worship of images without naming *pūjā* as such (although we do not know if this took place in a home shrine or a temple). His *Śrīraṅgagadya* implies image worship of Lord Raṅganātha in the *Śrīraṅgam* temple. Several external sources refer to Rāmānuja’s connection with temple worship.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ See Poykai Mutal-tiruvantāti 1.37; Tiruvāymoḷi 10.2.7; Tevāram 7.30.3; 7.30.8; 7.6.5.

⁶¹ This does not rule out the possibility. ORR and I argue that if one kind of expertise – such as playing the *yāl* or singing the Vedas – contributed to the life of the temple, then these performers were preferred to others (ORR/YOUNG 1986).

⁶² See StR 21, where he repeats *namo namo* four times.

⁶³ StR 28-29.

⁶⁴ It is possible that after Rāmānuja’s death, there was an attempt to link him more explicitly with the beloved places as part of the consolidation of the Śrīvaiṣṇava *sampradāya*. In *Irāmānuca-nūrrantāti*, Amutanār associates him with places mentioned by the Ālvārs in stanzas 60, 76, 91, and 106. In *Raṅganāthastotra* 8, Parāśarabhaṭṭar mentions, for instance, many places where Rāmānuja *enjoyed himself worshipping*. In *Rahasya-trayaśāram*, Vedāntadeśika mentions Rāmānuja’s commandments to his disciples at the time of his death. The third commandment is to provide rice, sandal paste, lamps, and garlands, for the beloved places (*ukantu-aruḷiṇadivvadeśaṅkaḷ*) (YOUNG 1978: 287). The *Guruparamparāprabhāvam* 6000, too, mentions this as well as numerous holy places that Rāmānuja visited while on pilgrimage (YOUNG 1978: 341).

Stotras for Mundane and Supramundane Goals

Vedic *stotras* are based on the divine origin of speech, mediated by gods to the hearts and minds (*dhī*) of poets. Consisting largely of epithets that allude to the deity's nature, actions, functions, and qualities, and set to melodies from the Sāmaveda, *stotras* have had two functions: to reveal imperceptible truth and to fulfill boons.⁶⁵

Tamil *bhakti* poets wrote about God's direct revelation to their "hearts." Their poems came to be considered divine speech, the Tamil Veda, although they themselves only allude to this idea. Like the Vedic *stotras*, these hymns consist of many epithets and many are sung. Each decade of stanzas concludes with a verse that promises mundane and supramundane boons (the *phalaśruti*). Some *stotras* eulogize the deity's body. Tiruppāñālvār's Amalanātipiran, for instance, praises the body of Nārāyaṇa at Śrīraṅgam. The *stotra* tradition continued, though in Sanskrit, with the Ācāryas. NANCY NAYAR has noted Ālvār influence on these.⁶⁶ The first ones, she points out, were Yāmuna's Stotraratna and Śrīsūkta (Catuṣślokī). Rāmānuja's prose Gadyas are hymns in praise of the deity and have been compared to *stotras*. Kūreśa, his disciple, wrote five *stotras* and Kūreśa's son Parāśarabhaṭṭar four.

Integration of Tamil and Sanskrit Traditions

The *bhakti* poems are in Tamil, but they contain many Sanskrit religious elements. They commonly mention the Vedas in general or the "four Vedas" in particular. The four Tiruvantātis of Poykai, Pūta, Pey, and Tirumalīcai refer, for instance, to the Vedas as the speech of Māyōṇ and Māyōṇ as the melody of the four Vedas, one who is of the Vedas, one who recites well the four Vedas, one who becomes the Vedas and their hidden meaning, one who is the foremost essence of the Vedas, and the austerity that is found in the four Vedas.⁶⁷ Pūta asks for grace so that his garland of composition

⁶⁵ GONDA 1975: 44, 119, 71.

⁶⁶ NAYAR 1992: 20-21.

⁶⁷ See Tiruvantāti 1.5; 1.68; 2.45; 3.11; 3.39; 4.13; 4.72 in YOUNG 1993: 89-90.

might become the Vedas (*maṛai*) (2.83). Kulacēkaraṇ wonders when he will praise “the Lord who is the northern language (*vaṭamoli*) and the poem of sweet joy in Tamil.”⁶⁸ And Tirumaṅkai mentions the Lord “in the form of the sound of Tamil ... and in the form of the northern language (*vaṭacol*) ... which is the *antaṇar* (Brāhmaṇas).”⁶⁹ The Ācāryas carried on this tradition of the two traditions, Sanskrit and Tamil, although authors did not always write in both languages.

These diagnostic features of religious Śrīvaiṣṇavism suggest that we are dealing with a group that identified itself mainly with Nārāyaṇa. Specific *mantras* were important for identity. These included both *mantras* without *om* and one with *om*. The latter is only an allusion, however, which implies a secret (*rahasya*). If receiving the *mantra* belonged to a secret tradition, then that would imply initiation. If so, because the community of devotees and their equality were stressed, I assume that every devotee would have received it. And it would have included a *mantra* with *om* (even though that would have been against Vedic orthodoxy, at least in Smārta circles, because *om* was the sacred syllable par excellence, the very essence of the Vedas, and to be uttered only by Brāhmaṇas or the twice-born).⁷⁰ But this group viewed the Vedas as identity or status markers and therefore looked favourably on Brāhmaṇas, whether or not all of the devotees were Brāhmaṇas themselves. This might suggest leadership by a “liberal” Brāhmaṇa group. Spirituality was defined by surrender, refuge, extreme humility, inclusion of all devotees whatever their social standing, and specific acts of worship (cleaning the floor, bowing, offering flowers, incense, and lamps, bringing pots of water, singing *stotras*, and so forth), which promised the fulfilment of all desires, worldly and other worldly. In addition, worship combined mental and physical visualization of an image of God.

⁶⁸ Perumāḷ-tirumōḷi 1.4: *tam talaivaṇai am tamiliṇ inpapāviṇai avva-ṭa mōliyai parrārārkaḷ*.

⁶⁹ YOUNG 1993: 90.

⁷⁰ YOUNG 2002: 84-84.

II: THE QUESTION OF PRIESTS AND THEIR IDENTITY IN ĀLVĀR HYMNS

Most scholars have assumed that Pāñcarātrins were either priests in temples mentioned by Ālvārs or that the Brāhmaṇas, who were Ālvārs, were also Pāñcarātrin priests. But the Ālvār hymns do not mention priests. And we have no inscriptional evidence of Pāñcarātra presence in the temples of Tamilnadu at that time (from the seventh century to the ninth). This provokes questions about the presupposition of major Pāñcarātra influence on the Ālvārs. In this section, therefore, I will provide two types of explanation for the absence of priests in Ālvār hymns. Either priests were there but of no importance to the Ālvārs (a question of perspective) or priests were not there or not there in any significant way (a question of historical circumstances). I will then discuss what other scholars have considered evidence for the presence of Pāñcarātrins in *bhakti* hymns.

One argument is that priests were there but of no importance to the Ālvārs. First, the *bhakti* poetic tradition associated God pre-eminently with a *caṅkam* poetic tradition that connected the hero as ruler or lover with the five types of landscapes that characterize a kingdom (*aiṇṇai*), although the *caṅkam* concepts of heroic ruler and lover were transformed into God and the five landscapes into the deity's beloved places (the terms used in the later commentaries are *ukantaruḷiṇanilaṅkaḷ* and *divyadeśāḥ*).⁷¹ Second, this use of concrete imagery could be attributed, as in *caṅkam* poetry, to good poetic composition: graphic, lively description. Third, because many temples were small and insignificant until monumental stone architecture became prevalent due to Śilpāsāstra or Āgama expertise and enhanced patronage, *bhakti* poems did not feature references to temples.⁷² Fourth, the rhetoric of devotion and meditation focused on the relationship between devotee and God, not on the temple as God's resi-

⁷¹ YOUNG 1978: 37-66.

⁷² The names of places that *bhakti* poets described often end with *ūr*, which means small village. About four hundred of the temples that they praise are located in the agriculturally rich Kaveri delta. Many others are located elsewhere along the Kaveri or along rivers such as the Vaikai, the Tamraparni, the Pennai, and the Palar. Fame of place is related to the fertility of its fields and the prosperity that it provides (based on YOUNG 1993: 98).

dence. And fifth, if the instigators of this Tamil *bhakti* genre were Brāhmaṇas, they might have focused in their poems on the deity or the landscape of the place and avoided the topics of priests and rituals because of the controversy in orthodox Brahmanical circles over image worship and priests who lived off temple income.⁷³

The other argument is that priests were not there or not there in any significant way. *bhakti* hymns tell devotees to paint or make images and to do services such as cleaning the floor, picking and plaiting flowers, and bringing pots of water, incense, and lamps. Because devotees *themselves* did these ritual activities, according to the hymns, we could argue that priests did not officiate at formal rituals in temples. These activities look more like worship done in home shrines or in temples that belonged to individuals. When you remember that many of the temples praised by *bhakti* saints were minor structures in villages, the gap between home shrine and temple narrows. This lack of references to priests might indicate that traditions of household worship were gradually extending to temple worship and that no organized sectarian group with an identity of “temple priests” had yet emerged on a local level.⁷⁴ And if there were “unofficial” temple priests, the poetic rhetoric ignored them.

Some scholars of *bhakti* literature have assumed the presence of formal Pāñcarātra ritual in temples of the Tamil *bhakti* period.⁷⁵

⁷³ GRANOFF 1998a. See also GRANOFF 1998b.

⁷⁴ See my discussion of inscriptional evidence later in this chapter, which supports this position. Even the Guruparamparāprabhāvam 6000, the fourteenth/fifteenth-century hagiography, describes how Rāmānuja’s mother “advised him to go to the non-Brahmin disciple of Yāmuna, Tirukacci Nambi, a fervent lay devotee in Lord Varada’s temple, and seek his advice. Tirukacci Nambi told him to carry a pot of water every morning from a certain well to the temple and offer it for the morning service of Lord Varada. (Such service was one of the characteristic forms of lay worship to the temple image form of the Deity permitted those who were not the temple priests)” (CARMAN 1974: 29). Again, the inscriptions do not mention an institutionalized priesthood but rather the participation in temple service or work (such as carrying pots of water).

⁷⁵ See NARAYANAN 1987: 11-14 for Āgamic ritual in the temples of the *bhakti* period. There are some dissidents. HARDY is cautious. In general terms, he suggests, we can assume that Vaikhānasas and Pāñcarātrins were involved in Tamil temple worship. But he adds that the history is obscure.

Their assumption is based on the following kinds of evidence:⁷⁶ (1) references to the number four or to the four divine forms in *bhakti* hymns refer to Pāñcarātra's four *vyūhas*: Vāsudeva, Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha; (2) the list of twelve divine names mentioned by several Ālvārs is found in Pāñcarātra texts; (3) the mode of worship described in the *bhakti* hymns is that of the Pāñcarātra tradition; (4) branding mentioned by Periyālvār is characteristic of Pāñcarātra; (5) the *tirumantra*, mentioned by some Ālvārs, is mentioned in Pāñcarātra texts as well; (6) the number five, in the hymns, can refer to either the name *pañcarātra* (five nights) or the *pāñcakālīka* (the

The Ālvārs do not mention characteristic features of these groups, the five *mūrtis* and the five [*sic*: four] *vyūhas* respectively. "But what is more important: it would appear that the Early Ālvārs, deriving some general information from these schools, are unique in fusing the temple worship with theistic yoga as a unified form of devotion. Although both schools cultivate *yoga* and *pūjā*, their literature shows that they were kept separate. Both schools being representatives of Northern forms of religion, the synthesis of the Early Ālvārs thus appears as a typically Tamil response which manifests itself in the mysticism of union and expresses itself through Tamil poetic structures" (HARDY 1983: 301-302). I think that HARDY has missed the southern Brahmanical traditions in which this fusion had already occurred.

⁷⁶ Here is NARAYANAN's summary of what she considers to be the Pāñcarātra evidence. "Periyālvār, Tirumaḷicai, and Nammālvār ... refer to the 'three forms' or the 'four forms' of Viṣṇu. In *Pañcarātra* terminology, the 'four forms' are Vāsudeva, Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, but the Ālvārs do not use these names. The *Pañcarātra* also gives the names of twelve emanations: Keśava, Nārāyaṇa, Mādhava, Govinda, Viṣṇu, Madhusūdana, Trivikrama, Vāmana, Śrīdhara, Hṛṣīkeśa, Padmanābha, and Dāmodara. Periyālvār mentions these twelve names ... in this *Tirumoli* (2.3.1-13), and Nammālvār weaves them into his *Tiruvāymoli* (2.7.1-13). The *Tirumoli* of Periyālvār and the *Tiruvāymoli* of Nammālvār consist of sets of eleven verses, but in sets where the twelve names are mentioned there are thirteen verses, one devoted to each name and the last indicating the happy consequences of chanting them" (NARAYANAN 1987: 11). In addition, she mentions worship of Viṣṇu in a temple; exhortations to offer flowers, sandalwood paste, and incense to him; chanting the *tirumantra*; branding with marks of discus and conch; and the five *vēlvis* (sacrifices) as in "He, who I think is the three fires, the four Vedas, the five sacrifices, the six limbs of the Vedas, the seven notes of a melody (Periya Tirumoli 2.10.1)" (NARAYANAN 1987: 12).

five daily rituals in a Pāñcarātra temple); and (7) temple architecture during the Ālvār period follows Pāñcarātra prescriptions.

I suggest that these assertions provide extremely thin evidence for the presence of Pāñcarātrins in Ālvār temples, at least the kind of Pāñcarātrins described in extant Āgamas.⁷⁷

(1) Playing with numbers is common in *bhakti* hymns. Four, for instance, could allude to the Lord in the form of the four Vedas – especially given repeated references to the four Vedas as in Periya-tirumoli 2.10.1, which mentions the three fires, four Vedas, five sacrifices, and so on.

(2) In some Pāñcarātra texts, the twelve deities are the tutelary deities of the months.⁷⁸ In others, they are known as the *vyūhāntaras*:⁷⁹ Keśava, Nārāyaṇa, and Mādhava arise from Vāsudeva; Govinda, Viṣṇu, and Madhusūdana from Saṃkarṣana; Trivikrama, Vāmana, and Śrīdhara from Pradyumna; and Hṛṣīkeśa, Padmanābha, and Dāmodara from Aniruddha. This list of twelve is expanded to twenty-four in the Pādmasaṃhitā (where they are called *mūrtis* rather than *vyūhāntaras*).⁸⁰ It seems to me that the list of twelve names associated with the twelve months was the original idea. The list appears in the Puruṣasūktavidhāna section of the Ṛgvidhāna, which, as I will argue, probably existed independently by the fourth or fifth century. In any case, the list appears also in Brhatsaṃhitā,⁸¹ which belongs to the sixth century. The fact that it is found in these texts means that it belonged to a more general Vaiṣṇava tradition. More importantly, the Ṛgvidhāna and Brhatsaṃhitā are earlier than the Ālvārs. This means that Pāñcarātra texts need not be the source. Besides, according to ALEXIS SANDERSON, the extant Pāñcarātra texts can be dated not earlier than 850.⁸²

⁷⁷ For some time, I thought that Pāñcarātra might have influenced Periyālvār and Āṇṭāl, but I no longer think so.

⁷⁸ See GUPTA 1992a: 164-178.

⁷⁹ See AS 5.46-49b, LT 4.27-28, PauṣS 36.145-168, and NārS 1.55c-56. I would like to thank RASTELLI: personal communication, for providing these references.

⁸⁰ PādS *jñānapada* 2.21-28.

⁸¹ BS 105.14-16.

⁸² SANDERSON 2001: 38-39.

(3) We do not need Pāñcarātra for references to temples of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa. First, many temples had been built throughout India between the third century and the seventh, including South India. Second, offerings of flowers, incense, lamps, and so forth were extremely common in image worship among Buddhists, Jainas, and Śaivas.⁸³

(4) Branding with conch and discus was generally associated with Vaiṣṇavas and need not refer specifically to Pāñcarātra. It is alluded to in the Viṣṇusahasranāma of the Mahābhārata: *kṛtalakṣaṇa* (one who has a mark).⁸⁴ According to RASTELLI, the “*pañcasamśkāras* are only described in later Saṃhitās (see the Index of SMITH 1980 s.v. *pañcasamśkāra*). In prescriptions for the *dīkṣā* of the early Saṃhitās, branding is not mentioned. One verse in the Sātvatasamhitā (22.9) describes a *samayin* as having a body that is branded with a *cakra* (*cakrataptatanu*), but it does not say when and where he has received this branding. Perhaps the word *cakrataptatanu* is a later variant. Branding is certainly not distinctive, therefore, of Pāñcarātra.”⁸⁵

(5) The *tirumantra* had been popular since the time of the Nārāyaṇa-Upaniṣad (from approximately the fifth BCE to the first century CE), which was connected with the Atharvaveda and Kṛṣṇa-Yajurveda⁸⁶ and need not be attributed to early Pāñcarātra texts. In this context, it is important to recall that the latter include many *mantras*. If Pāñca-

⁸³ HARDY 1983: 30-31.

⁸⁴ YOUNG 2002: 96. Parāśarabhaṭṭar in his Śrīviṣṇusahasranāmabhāṣya comments on the name Kṛtalakṣaṇa. “He cites several passages. According to the Śrī Harivaṃśa, those who have the marks (*lakṣaṇa*) of discus and conch may come to God; those unmarked may not. According to the Viṣṇudharma [Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa], those who wear the signs of having taken refuge in God – that is, the discus and conch – and obey his commands do not harm other devotees. And according to the Viṣṇutattva, just as women wear ornaments to indicate their marital chastity, devotees wear the discus and conch as ornaments to indicate their marital faithfulness to God” (YOUNG 2002: 98). The Harivaṃśa was probably written about the fifth century, certainly before the time of the Ālvārs, although the Viṣṇudharma was later (between the seventh century and the tenth).

⁸⁵ RASTELLI: personal communication.

⁸⁶ YOUNG 2002: 86-87.

rātrins had been the primary influence on Ālvār hymns, we would expect to find more types of *mantra*, including ones directed to Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa.

(6) The five sacrifices belong to a formulaic description of Brāhmaṇas that Manu mentioned (3.67-72); these five *mahāyajñas* include the study and teaching of the Veda, offerings to the ancestors, offerings to the fire, *bali* oblations to all beings, and honouring guests. Therefore, it is unnecessary to connect the number five with the five nights (*pāñcarātra*) or temple rituals at five times (*pāñcakālīka*).

(7) Which came first, features of temple architecture or their description in Āgamic texts, is a chicken and egg problem. DENNIS HUDSON has argued that the Vaikuṇṭha Perumāḷ temple, built in 770 in Kāñci by the Pallava Nandivarman II, is a Pāñcarātra temple. But the authors of Pāñcarātra texts could have based their descriptions on this temple or similar ones. In any case, HUDSON's identification of the four *vyūha* figures lacks iconographical specificity.⁸⁷

In short, alternative and more convincing explanations can account for all the evidence proposed by scholars who argue that Pāñcarātra priests performed rituals in Ālvār temples. As a result, I do not think that Ālvār hymns were influenced directly by Pāñcarātrins. There might have been some Pāñcarātrins, however, in other Tamil circles. The Bhāgavatapurāṇa, assigned by HARDY to the ninth century in Tamilnadu, integrates Pāñcarātra elements (although scholars think that Pāñcarātra was not a major influence even on this text).⁸⁸ But many questions remain regarding the date and place of this text. And if it were a ninth century text, composed in Tamilnadu, why did Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas ignore such a major Nārāyaṇa-oriented work? The Bhāgavata's author might have introduced the Pāñcarātra element by way of textual knowledge, in any case, and not because Pāñcarātra priests were officiating in Tamil temples. Or integration of the Pāñcarātra element into that Nārāyaṇa perspective might have occurred outside Tamilnadu.

⁸⁷ HUDSON 1993: 147-156; compare to iconographic features of Vāsudeva, Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha in SMITH 1969: 116.

⁸⁸ For Pāñcarātra elements in the Bhāgavatapurāṇa see SHERIDAN 1986: 63-65. SHERIDAN attributes this to the eclectic nature of the text. For arguments that this Purāṇa was written in Tamilnadu in about the ninth century, see HARDY 1983: 488, 490, 492, 526, and appendix XI.

Yet another argument is that Yāmuna lived in the tenth century and wrote a defence of the Pāñcarātra in his Āgamaprāmāṇya. This implies that Pāñcarātra temple priests must have already been established in the temples of Tamilnadu. When I compare the Āgamaprāmāṇya with Ālvār hymns, though, I find some major differences. (1) The deity is called Viṣṇu (24 times); Vāsudeva (17 times), and Nārāyaṇa (12 times). Given the number of citations and the fact that the opening verse pays homage to Viṣṇu, it is reasonable to conclude that the author preferred Viṣṇu. But given the *mantras* and many references to the dark deity and the popularity of the reclining form, it is reasonable to conclude that the Ālvārs preferred Nārāyaṇa. (2) There are several references to *dikṣā*. The Ālvārs say nothing specifically about initiation, however, aside from one reference to branding by Periyālvār. (3) The text refers only once to refuge, although this is a common Ālvār theme. (4) The Āgamaprāmāṇya refers to the consecration ritual (*pratiṣṭhā*) for transforming a material image into the deity, but Ālvār hymns refer only to the devotee's initiative for making him fully present in a form according to their imaginations. (5) The Āgamaprāmāṇya is concerned about temple ritual and the status of Brāhmaṇa priests. Ālvār hymns, however, are concerned about their personal experiences of God, both mental and physical. (6) The Āgamaprāmāṇya does not refer to asceticism, even within a householder orientation, as an important part of the Brāhmaṇas' identity. But Ālvār hymns allude often to a yogic-devotional dimension. (7) The Āgamaprāmāṇya describes worship as the *pāñcakālīka* rituals performed by Brāhmaṇas in temples. This focus on five established times of worship, performed by a specific Brahmanical group with a particular initiation that makes them eligible for this task, is very different from the lack of references in Ālvār hymns to any priests and the focus on personal worship by all devotees. (8) As for service, the Āgamaprāmāṇya distinguishes between service done by Brāhmaṇas and that done by mere servants who work for the temple. This introduces a hierarchical element. But Ālvār hymns stress that all devotees are servants not only of God but also of all other devotees, which emphasizes equality. (9) The work sees ritual as central. But the Ālvārs thought that hymns (*stotras*) were the most important offerings to God. (10) The Āgamaprāmāṇya refers nowhere to Tamil tradition, much less to the integration of Tamil and Sanskrit traditions. But this is of central importance in Ālvār hymns. (11) For these reasons, it is problematic to document continuity from

Ālvār hymns to the Āgamaprāmāṇya and to argue that its defense of Pāñcarātra in the tenth century (the date that is often assigned to Yāmuna) can be read back into Ālvār hymns as proof of Pāñcarātra priests in the temples that are mentioned in Ālvār hymns.

The point here is that we have no convincing evidence that Pāñcarātra informed Ālvār hymns or that Pāñcarātra priests were involved in the temples that the Ālvārs described. This opens up the question of who the Ālvārs were and whether Yāmuna came from a different tradition altogether.

III: OTHER INFLUENCES ON THE ĀLVĀRS

Scholars of Śrīvaiṣṇavism have seldom examined possible antecedents, aside from Pāñcarātra and Tamil *caṅkam* poetic motifs, to Ālvār hymns. Nor have they examined the possibility of Brahmanical influence on them. This might have occurred because of the integrative appearance of these hymns, which include every type of person in the community of devotees, because of egalitarianism in the Śrīvaiṣṇava *sampradāya*, especially that of the Tenkaḷai sect, or because of the prevailing anti-Brahmanism in modern Tamilnadu. In this section, I will examine several texts that probably existed between the fourth century and the sixth. I will link these with the Atharvaveda, Yajurveda, and Ṛgveda. In addition, I will look for a Mahāyāna Buddhist link with the Ālvārs.

An Atharvavedic Influence?

The Vāstusūtra-Upaniṣad is an intriguing text for thinking about possible Atharvavedic influences on the Ālvārs. It mentions cave temples and image halls (called *pratimāśālā*, *rūpaśālā*, *śaila-guhā*, and *mahāśaila*)⁸⁹ as well as image worship (called *saparyā* and *pūjana*). According to the commentator, the practices of this text were known from the Vaitaraṇī to the Kāvērī – that is, throughout South India. This text is of interest here, because it links the Atharvavedins with temple traditions, legitimizes temple worship in Vedic terms, and links mental visualization of images in meditation with worship of physical images.

⁸⁹ See BÄUMER 1996: x.

Several manuscripts of this Upaniṣad composed in defective Sanskrit were found during the twentieth century in remote Atharvavedic villages in Orissa. These refer to the Atharvavedic sage Pippalāda. Although scholars debate the work's authenticity, several sections are indeed old; deities such as Rudra, Sūrya, Ambā, and Īla are Vedic. But others are more recent; deities such as the consorts (Śaktis) of major Vedic deities (Viṣṇu is associated with Bhū and Lakṣmī, for instance, and Rudra with Ambā and Ambālikā) are Tantric. Besides Tantric elements, Sāṃkhya has been integrated into this theistic context. According to ALICE BONER, parts of the text that focus on the general principles of form-formation might have preceded the Śilpa sections of the Mātsyapurāṇa, the Viṣṇudharmottara, and the Bṛhatsaṃhitā, which date from the fourth century to the sixth.⁹⁰ DIPAK BHATTACHARYA⁹¹ notes that the Vāstusūtra-Upaniṣad distinguishes between the *sūtras* (which say nothing explicit about the Atharvaveda) and an explanatory text (which contains references to Pippalāda and his disciples, although its content is probably more in the tradition of Śaunaka⁹²). BHATTACHARYA concludes that, despite inconsistencies (including many late terms) and few obvious connections with the Atharvaveda, it could have emerged from a long-standing Atharvavedic interest in architecture.

Whatever its origins – the *sūtras* might be earlier than the Pippalāda explanations – the Vāstusūtra-Upaniṣad places image-construction firmly within the Vedic tradition. It refers to the Vedic origins of an underlying sacred geometry (*śulva*) of sacrificial altars, anthropomorphic images, and image-panels that were made by the *sthāpaka* (the Brāhmaṇa who oversaw the work of artisans⁹³) as rit-

⁹⁰ BONER ³1996: 3.

⁹¹ BHATTACHARYA ³1996: 35-42.

⁹² Śaunaka is the reputed author of the Rgvidhāna (and the Bṛhatdevatā). Because the subject matter of the Rgvidhāna is Atharvavedic – magical formulas – it has been connected with the latter in popular imagination. The parallel text for the Atharvaveda is the Kauśikasūtra (BHAT 1987: 16).

⁹³ See JACOB 2004: 52ff. The Mānasāra was written sometime between 750 and 1750, probably in the second half of this period (JACOB 2004: 10) in Śaiva circles of Tamilnadu: “The *sthāpati* is said to be the source (‘maker’) [of the image]; the *sthāpaka* is regarded as its life-princi-

ual acts to simulate the process of creation. But first, the Vāstusūtra-Upaniṣad presents a case for the image's legitimacy and importance. (ALICE BONER thinks that a controversy might have been raging.⁹⁴) This is introduced by having Pippalāda's disciples, Vedic sacrificial priests who are ignorant of the topic, ask their *guru* basic questions. Drawing on the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, and Upaniṣads, he compares the primal form with the primal word (*vāc*) and the concrete form with the spoken or written word. He compares the power of the sacrifice to that of the image as a means of liberation. And he equates the status of the sacrificial priest with that of the *sthāpaka*, calling the latter *śilpahotr* or *vāstuhotr*. His disciples address the *sthāpaka* in several ways: as master, incarnation of the branch of action constituting form production (*vāstukarmāṅgāvatāra*); as a person of sixteen parts (*ṣoḍaśakalapuruṣa*), which refers to the *pañjara* or geometric diagram used to draw a person/deity; and as a righteous person (*dharmapurūṣa*).

Pippalāda describes how *brahman* without qualities (*nirguṇa*) became *brahman* with qualities (*sagūṇa*) and also produced mind in order to create infinite forms. Yet *brahman* remains one, the life-force (*prāṇa*) of all that exists, including images. Interestingly, Pippalāda considers the *yūpa* (a wooden post for tying the sacrificial animal) the key symbol of this creative process. It embodies not only the primary line (the post) and circle (the spherical top of the post) but also the primary man (who is sacrificed to become the universe as in the *Puruṣasūkta*). After explaining this fundamental shape, Pippalāda discusses stones, geometric diagrams, carvings, disposition of limbs, portrayals of character, gestures, postures, ornaments, armaments, vehicles, and so forth. Finally, he mentions that images inspire, elevate, purify, and delight; create faith, steadfast devotion, and supreme knowledge (*parā vidyā*); and lead to liberation (*mokṣa*). Images that arise in the minds of *ṛṣis*, who can see the essence of all manifestations, guide devotees by removing false images and providing true ones.⁹⁵

ple. Therefore, from the beginning of the operation, one should work in company of [the other], at all times" (Mānasāra LXX, 3-4 translated by JACOB 2004: 53).

⁹⁴ BONER ³1996: 5.

⁹⁵ BONER ³1996: 10-11.

Also of interest here is the commentary on the Vāstusūtra-Upa-
niṣad by Nigama Ḍiṇḍima. It looks like a product of the Taittirīya
branch of the Yajurveda (see the Yajurveda section of this chapter)
with its introduction of two key deities – Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa and Rudra-
Śiva – and its combination of worship and meditation focused on the
inner breath (*prāṇa*) of life and form.

Several aspects of this text and commentary could have con-
tributed to the ethos that created the *bhakti* hymns. It is an Atharva-
vedin text, which might explain why the Ālvārs consistently men-
tioned four Vedas. Its link between cave-temples and image-halls
might allude to a tradition of contemplating paintings and statues,
one that fuses yogic and devotional contexts with mental and physi-
cal visualization – which is what we find in Ālvār hymns. Its legiti-
mation of image worship in a Vedic context might account for the
juxtaposition of image worship and Vedic imagery (Vedas, sacri-
fices, and so forth) in *bhakti* hymns. Its idea that God is one but has
many forms is like the Ālvār view of divine ontology. Also germane
to *bhakti* poems is the link between image worship and faith, stead-
fast devotion, supreme knowledge, and liberation. The idea that *ṛṣis*
see the real essence of all forms is Ālvār-like. One example would be
Nammālvār's pronouncement that this form and that form are the one
primordial god.⁹⁶ Finally, the link between making an image and the
Puruṣasūkta connects this text not with the Ālvārs per se but with
several texts that I will discuss in a moment, ones that might also
have influenced the Ālvārs.

In the meantime, I want to draw your attention to the fact that
Brāhmaṇas were already associated with the four Vedas in Tamil
caṅkam poetry, the earliest Tamil literature. There they are referred
to as “sages” (*muṇivar*), seers (*pārppār* or *antaṇar*⁹⁷), and as “those
who know the four Vedas” (*nanmarai*).⁹⁸ These references to sages

⁹⁶ See Tiruvāymoḷi 3.6.9, which I have already discussed.

⁹⁷ The etymology of *antaṇar* is problematic according to the Tamil
Lexicon 1982-83: 80, 94. It might be from *am* (the instrument of seeing) or
anta (end; therefore Vedānta). I think that it is derived from *am*, because
that would make it a synonym of *pārppār* and be a Tamil equivalent of *ṛṣi*.

⁹⁸ CLOTHEY summarizes the evidence on Brāhmaṇas and Vedas in the
caṅkam texts as follows. “In the *Puraṇānuru* ... the Vedas are termed ‘old
work’ (*mutunūl*) and are said to be of four kinds and to have issued from the

and seers in *caṅkam* works suggest Brāhmaṇa ṛṣis or visionaries.⁹⁹ Several *caṅkam* references connect these seers with kings and warrior rituals.¹⁰⁰ Because some Brāhmaṇas in the *caṅkam* period worked for royal courts or chiefdoms, moreover, they might have become involved in Tamil literary culture. We have at least one explicit reference to this kind of Brāhmaṇa in *caṅkam* texts: Kapilar, poet for the famous chieftan Pāri, who composed the *Kuṛiñci-ppaṭṭu*.¹⁰¹ The hypothesis of considerable (although possibly indirect) Brahmanical involvement in Tamil poetic traditions might help account for the creative adaptation of *caṅkam* genres and tropes to Vedic imagery as well as the *bhakti* allusions to religious possession and emotional ecstasy.

“Four Vedas” is an important diagnostic marker. We now assume that the concept of Veda refers to *four* Vedas. But it took many

mouth of the Ancient One (presumably Śiva [more likely Brahmā]) (Pura. 166:1-4). An early poet pays his respects to brāhmaṇs (*pārppār* – literally, seers) who have read the Vedas (Aiṅkuru. 387) ... Brāhmaṇs and even parrots residing in the brāhmaṇ quarters recite the Vedas (Maturai. 654-656; Perumpāṇ 300-301). Reference is made in Patirruppattu 24 to the six duties of the brāhmaṇs – teaching, learning, sacrifice, helping others to perform sacrifices, giving charity, and taking presents (Subrahmaniam 1966: 555, citing Tol. Porulatikāram 75:1). Sacrifices having Vedic roots performed by a Pāṇṭiyan chieftain are described in Pura. 15:17-21. Those learned in the four Vedas attend the sacrifice performed by a Pāṇṭiyan chieftain (Pura. 26:12-15). Another Pāṇṭiyan chieftain patronizes scholarly seers (Pura. 221:6). Another ‘king’ gives presents to those priests who officiated in sacrifices (Patirru. 64:3-6). Cōla ‘kings’ refrain from doing things detested by brāhmaṇs (*pārppār*) (Pura. 43:13-15). Penance is done in the hills with matted hair (Narr. 141:3-5). The performance of sacrifice and ritual related to the brāhmaṇic community is mentioned rather frequently (Pura 2:22-24; 99:1; 122:3; Paṭṭiṇ. 200; Patirru. 18-19; 21:5-7; 74:1-2; Aka 220:608; Perumpāṇ 315-16). Sacrifices performed by a Pāṇṭiyan ‘king’ and several Cōla ‘kings’ are described in the Puraṇāṇuru (Pura. 15:17-21; 224:4-9; 367:12-14; 44:19).” (CLOTHEY 1978: 62-63).

⁹⁹ MISRA 1978: 83; 107.

¹⁰⁰ See Puraṇāṇuru 224 and 372.

¹⁰¹ ZVELEBIL 1974: 44.

centuries for the fourth one, the Atharvaveda, to be accepted.¹⁰² In the Buddhist Jātaka tales, for instance, Brāhmaṇas are still referred to as those who know the three Vedas. In Orissa, moreover, inscriptions from before the seventh century almost always mention only Brāhmaṇas of the three Vedas.¹⁰³ Atharvavedins were experimental in their attempts to spread Vedic culture. In the process, they participated in local traditions. They were well known for integrating local deities into the Vedic pantheon and were instrumental in popularizing Śiva, Skanda, and Nārāyaṇa. They linked sectarian Upaniṣads, such as the Nārāyaṇopaniṣad and the Mahānārāyaṇopaniṣad, with the Atharvaveda. In addition, they introduced new kinds of expertise – such as Āyurvedic medicine, architecture, and dance – into Vedic circles.

Atharvavedins, too, were often the *purohitas* of kings and might have spread the *aśvamedha* ritual for coronations into new regions beyond the Gangetic heartland. According to ARVIND SHARMA, the Atharvaveda has been associated with Śūdras, Śūdra kings, and a reversal symbolism: the Atharvaveda has been called, for instance, the Veda of the Śūdras (and the first among the Vedas according to the Mahābhārata¹⁰⁴). SHARMA notes that Atharvavedins were closely associated with the *sūtas* or bards in Sanskrit texts. This suggests that they might have had close connections with court poets in other regions. Atharvavedins were famous for prognostication, moreover, and used the word *muni*.¹⁰⁵ Some scholars, says SHARMA, think that the *dāsas* of the Ṛgveda were transformed into the Śūdra *varṇa* and might have had a connection with the *vrātyas*. A “people on the margins of orthodoxy,” they spoke the same language but did not have the same lifestyle or undergo *upanayana* (through neglect

¹⁰² See WITZEL 1997: 275-284 for the early history of the Atharvaveda and 284-287 for the development of the concept of four Vedas.

¹⁰³ In Orissa, for example, inscriptions from before the seventh century mention only Brāhmaṇas of the three Vedas (SINGH 1994: 292).

¹⁰⁴ SHARMA 2000: 255; citing E.W. HOPKINS, *The Great Epic of India*. New York 1901, 380.

¹⁰⁵ MONIER-WILLIAMS 1964: 823.

or ineligibility) and became associated with Śūdras and *rājanyas* (kings).¹⁰⁶

Given this description, we should not find it surprising that Atharvavedins were active in Tamilnadu during the *caṅkam* period (some bards possibly belonging to the *vrātya/dāsa* groups on the fringes of Vedic society), developed royal connections, acted as bards or *munis*, and made prognostications. They continued to be active, moreover, into the *bhakti* period. Because of their presence in Andhra, they might have been involved in the development of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu (and Śaiva) sectarianism there as well. If so, then the link between Atharvavedins in Tamilnadu and their counterparts coming from the Deccan would make sense as a dynamic merger of several religious streams: Nārāyaṇa sectarianism, proselytism, temple worship, and *caṅkam* religious motifs of possession and emotional ecstasy.

Later Atharvavedin history is especially obscure. Some scholars have suggested that they gradually died out as a major cultural force. If so, what might have happened to them in Tamilnadu? One possibility is that they gradually lost their Vedic expertise. (The Cilappatikāram, from the sixth or seventh century, refers to a village with Brāhmaṇas who still wear the sacred thread but have taken to singing, because they no longer recite the Vedas.¹⁰⁷) People like this might have become the singers of *bhakti* hymns at temples, a group that is mentioned in Tamil inscriptions from the eleventh century. Another possibility, although it is beyond the purview of my texts and inscriptions, is that Atharvavedins sought power in military circles. Instead of being the poets who sang the praise of rulers and their lands, they became militant Brāhmaṇas¹⁰⁸ or petty rulers them-

¹⁰⁶ See SHARMA 2000: 257-258 for textual substantiation.

¹⁰⁷ PARTHASARATHY 1993: 131.

¹⁰⁸ VELUTHAT 1978: 102-115. VELUTHAT refers to an inscription of 866 in the copper plates of an Āy King. It mentions a *śalai*, attached to a Vaiṣṇava temple at Uḷakkuṭiṇi, for ninety-five student *caṭṭas* (Sanskrit: *chātra*) who belonged to the Pavaliva (Bahrva), Taittirīya, and Talavakāra Vedic traditions. These Brāhmaṇas, who learned the Vedas and how to fight with arms, were honoured. Sometimes, they were classified with revered teachers, or *bhaṭṭas*, and they served as a para-military troops not only for

selves. If so, this might help to explain Āḷvārs such as Kulacēkaraṇ and Tirumaṅkai, who used not only religious metaphors but also military ones. Or Atharvavedins might have become the Brāhmaṇa experts who oversaw the making of images and temples, a subject called *rūpāvatāra*, in eleventh-century inscriptions (see below). All this might indicate why the Atharvaveda was taught much less often than the other Vedas during the eleventh century.

A Yajurvedic Influence?

Three traditions were associated with the Yajurveda. One was the “black” (Kṛṣṇa) Taittirīya tradition of the Yajurveda. This included the Kāṇḍīkeya school, which was divided into the Āpastamba and Baudhāyana schools. Two others belonged to the “white” Yajurveda tradition: the Vaikhāṇasa and the Vājin (Vājasaneyin).¹⁰⁹ Scholars have associated the Taittirīya and Vaikhāṇasa traditions

the king but also for religious communities.” See also his references to the *ghaṭika* in Kāñcī.

¹⁰⁹ According to COLAS, “no Vedic *śākhā* is so closely and exclusively connected with Vaiṣṇavism as the Vaikhāṇasa *śākhā* is” (COLAS 2003: 236). The Ṛgveda contains references to a sage by the name of Vaikhāṇasa. The Brāhmaṇas and the Taittirīya-Āraṇyaka contain equations of the words *vaikhāṇasa*, *ṛṣi*, and *muni*. The Rāmāyaṇa contains a few references to the Vaikhāṇasas. The Śāntiparvan of the Mahābhārata refers to their exclusive connection with Hari-Nārāyaṇa and the Dharma of the Ekāntins (those who worship only one deity, that is, Nārāyaṇa). And the Nārāyaṇīyaparvan includes a description of them as forest hermits (COLAS 1996: 13f.). The Baudhāyanadharmasūtra (composed between 600 BCE and 300 BCE) refers to Vaikhāṇasa dietary rules, robes, ascetic practices, fire rituals (according to the *śrāmaṇaka* rite), ten initiations (*dikṣā*), and so forth (COLAS 1996: 14). Many of these appear also in the Gautamadharmasāstra (COLAS 1996: 14). Somehow, all this gave rise to the tradition of a Vaikhāṇasa Vedic *śākhā*, one that was associated especially with the third *āśrama* (*vanaprastha*) but more broadly conceived as the classic four *āśramas* (and therefore encompassing a Brahmanical householder tradition). The Baudhāyanadharmasūtra refers to Skanda, Sanatkumāra, Viśākha, Ṣaṇmukha, Mahāśena, and Subrahmaṇya. If this text was known in Tamilnadu, it might have been one reason why Murukaṇ eventually became identified with the deity known by the names Skanda and so forth.

especially with South India (*dakṣiṇapatha*). Despite these divisions, though, they often overlapped.¹¹⁰ The Yajurveda is of special interest here, because some of its later traditions include Śūdras in Vedic rituals.¹¹¹ According to SHARMA, the Śūdras were associated with the White Yajurveda. “The following pieces of evidence,” he says, “point, in that direction. (1) The *ŚuklaYajurVeda* contains a verse (26.2) which has been interpreted as throwing open Vedic knowledge to all *varṇas*, including the *śūdras*. The exact significance of the verse is unclear but its inclusiveness has not been questioned. (2) The *Pāraskara Gr̥hyasūtra* is attached to the *ŚuklaYajurVeda* and con-

¹¹⁰ According to one Vaikhānasa tradition, Baudhāyana originally belonged to the white Yajurveda but left to join the Taittirīya. See COLAS 1996: 18 note 3; citing Ānandasamhitā XIX, 21. KANE distinguishes Baudhāyana from Kāṇva Bodhāyana, an earlier sage (KANE I: 40). After discussing all the evidence for the home of Baudhāyana, KANE concludes that he was a southerner (KANE I: 48) – which could mean that he lived anywhere south of the Narmadā but possibly in Maharashtra or Andhra – and wrote between the sixth century BCE and the third.

As for sources, KANE notes that Baudhāyana mentions all four Vedas by name in Baudhāyanadharmasūtra II.5.27 and refers to the Atharvaveda and Atharvāṅgirasas (which stands for the Atharvaveda in the Upaniṣads). See Baudhāyanadharmasūtra II.6.7-9; III.2 and 22 (KANE I: 44f.). In addition, Baudhāyana often mentions the Puruṣasūkta; the Taittirīyasamhitā, the Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa, the Taittirīya-Āraṇyaka, and the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa (KANE I: 44). And Baudhāyana “mentions a Vaikhānasa-śāstra in II.6.16, which appears to refer to the work of Vikhanas on hermits and speaks of Śrāmaṇaka (the rites prescribed by Vikhanas for initiation as hermit)” (KANE I: 45). These sources are of interest here, because they link a southern Brahmanical tradition with the four Vedas, the Puruṣasūkta, the Taittirīya tradition, and the Vaikhānasa tradition. These are precisely the diagnostic features that I have found in Tamil and Sanskrit texts from Tamilnadu.

Finally, the Baudhāyanadharmasūtra refers to attaining powers through *japa*, *homa*, *iṣṭi*, and *yantra* (KANE I: 40). It is striking that chanting the names of the deity (*japa*), oblations and vegetarian ritual offerings (*iṣṭi*), and meditation (*yantra*) are already linked with Vedic fire rituals (*homa*) that were performed by Brāhmaṇas. It would be a small step to move them from *homa* in the home, for instance, to *homa* in temples (once they became popular) or to image worship or image meditation as an addition to or substitute for fire worship.

¹¹¹ SHARMA 2000: 239.

tains an explicit provision (2.6) for the initiation into Vedic studies of *śūdras* of good character. This qualification is not unusual as *Āpastamba* forbids initiation of *brāhmaṇas* of bad character. (3) In some *smṛti* texts the following statement is found: *śūdrāḥ vājasaneyinaḥ*. ‘This is explained as meaning that the *śūdra* should follow the procedure prescribed in the *gṛhyasūtra* of the Vājasaneya Śākhā and a *brāhmaṇa* should repeat the mantra for him’ ... P.V. Kane points out that in the *Harivaṃśa* (*Bhaviṣyat-Parva*, Chap. III, 13) we find verses he translates as follows: ‘All will expound brahma; all will be Vājasaneyins; when the *yuga* comes to a close *śūdras* will make use of the word ‘bhoḥ’ in address (sarve brahma vadiṣyanti sarve vājasaneyinaḥ).’”¹¹²

Śūdras are sometimes associated with light along with the other *varṇas*; SHARMA thinks that this is a sign of their equality in the Yajurveda tradition.¹¹³ In addition, some passages suggest a reversal of hierarchy based on the symbolism of *four*: Śūdras as the fourth *varṇa* is the highest, the *anuṣṭubh*, the meter based on four lines is the best one and therefore that of the epics, which are accessible to Śūdras and women. Connections are made, moreover, between royalty and supremacy. SHARMA points out that horses are now the highest of animals; the *aśvamedha*, or horse sacrifice, is performed by kings and therefore the most important rite.¹¹⁴ (I would add that given its connections with royalty and caste-inclusiveness, the Yajurveda tradition is similar to the Atharvaveda.) He adds that the symbolism of feet, too, becomes important. Viṣṇu is the foundation of the universe; as Trivikrama, he takes three great steps across the cosmos; Śūdras are linked positively with the Lord’s feet.¹¹⁵

One text of the Vaikhānasa tradition is the Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra.¹¹⁶ Scholars date it to the fourth or fifth century¹¹⁷ and describe

¹¹² SHARMA 2000: 246.

¹¹³ SHARMA 2000: 247; citing Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā XVIII.48 and other texts.

¹¹⁴ SHARMA 2000: 251.

¹¹⁵ SHARMA 2000: 259.

¹¹⁶ COLAS notes that the Vaikhānasapravarakhaṇḍa, attached to some manuscripts of the Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra, is very close to the Kṛṣṇa-Yajurveda school of Baudhāyana (COLAS 1996: 23) (which worshipped both

it as Tamil-influenced (even though it is written in Sanskrit).¹¹⁸ If so, it might shed light on early Tamil literary allusions to Brāhmaṇas and image worship. It refers mainly to Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu being associated usually with ritual acts and Nārāyaṇa with meditation and spiritual life), but it is by no means narrowly sectarian.

The Vaikhānasaśmārtasūtra is striking, because it not only discusses image worship in the home but also alludes to image worship in temples. Worshippers should show devotion (*bhakti*) morning and evening after the *homa* in the fire at home (*grha*). This implies devotional meditation either by mentally visualizing the deity at the end of the *homa* or by worshipping an image in a home shrine or in the deity's house (*devāyatana*).¹¹⁹ COLAS notes references to making an image (*kalpayati*) but not specifically to who makes and installs it (*pratiṣṭhā*).¹²⁰ Because the text refers to no rituals for purification, he thinks that the maker is probably the householder himself.¹²¹ The text provides no detailed instructions on cutting the stone, wood, and so

Viṣṇu and Rudra). This means that it is not as exclusively Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa in its orientation as the later Vaikhānasa tradition (or the Ālvār hymns). The same text honours other deities, too, perhaps in image forms (COLAS 1996: 24 note 2). It refers to the ritual in a temple to Guha (Skanda), for instance. Nevertheless, COLAS thinks that this text is more monotheistic and sectarian than the Baudhāyanagrhyapariśiṣṭasūtra, which treats Viṣṇu and Rudra both separately and together. COLAS argues that a part of the Vaikhānasa school, even at the beginning of the ninth century, worshipped deities other than Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa and only gradually became purely Vaiṣṇava, although some had become so by the end of that century (COLAS 1996: 63). "Several passages of the Vaikhānasaśrautasūtra [which was written after the Smārta-sūtra] reveal a strong tendency towards devotion to Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa. Meditation on these two divine aspects accompanies the performance of several ritual acts." (COLAS 2003: 236)

¹¹⁷ COLAS follows KANE and CALAND on this (COLAS 1996: 22-23).

¹¹⁸ COLAS 1996: 22.

¹¹⁹ Vaikhānasaśmārtasūtra IV, 11, p. 64, l. 7-8; IV, 12, p. 65, l. 7-9 cited by COLAS 1996: 24 note 3.

¹²⁰ Vaikhānasaśmārtasūtra IV, 10, p. 62, l. 14 to IV, 11 cited by COLAS 1996: 24 note 4.

¹²¹ As in the Baudhāyanagrhyapariśiṣṭasūtra (COLAS 1996: 25).

forth, however, only instructions on “awakening” the deity and installing the image.¹²²

This work, too, describes four stages of life for the twice-born (the last, *saṁnyāsa*, is for Brāhmaṇas alone). It has considerable material on *nivṛtti*, or disengagement, and *yoga*. In one passage, the *yogin* sees and meditates on a form of the deity (*devatākāra*), which could be a concrete representation.¹²³ Renouncers may live in a temple, a *maṭha*, or under a tree.¹²⁴ Even householders, when concentrating on Nārāyaṇa with devotion (*bhakti*), may practice *yamas* and *niyamas*. These consist of bathing, purification, study, *tapas*, gift, sacrifice, fasting, suppressing sexual desire, resolution, and silence. This could be a kind of renunciation for householders, possibly as *vānaprasthins*. The text considers Nārāyaṇa the supreme *brahman*, and union with him (*sāyujya*) occurs in Vaikuṇṭha. Meditation, according to COLAS, oscillates between an exterior perception of the divine image and mystic contemplation of it. In short, the Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra has fused an ascetic Nārāyaṇa tradition with a Vedic sacrificial one. It has fused meditation on a mental image, moreover, with wor-

¹²² Here are the main steps of this three-day process. On the first day, the maker pours libations of clarified butter into the domestic fire, then other libations on the arms and legs of the image, and finally opens its eyes with a golden tool. Overnight, he immerses the image in a pot of water. On the second day, he honours the deity (*abhi arc*) with perfumed water and other ingredients. Then, he meditates on the deity as formless and on the image in the pot (with its vestments, ornaments, and so forth) as form. He chants a *mantra*, naming Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu, places offerings into the fire, and so forth. On the third day, he takes the image to its residence, uttering “I install Viṣṇu” and directing the words *svar*, *bhuvas*, *bhūh* and *om* to the image’s (*bimba*) head, the navel, the feet, and the heart. Next, he showers “powerful water” (*śaktiyuta*) from the pot on the image’s head while saying, “I invoke Viṣṇu.” Finally, he performs worship and offers a cooked oblation. The Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra then describes the daily ritual. It consists of several offerings, including flowers, accompanied by *mantras*, meditation on the deity as the recipient of the sacrifice (*vajñapurūṣa*), recitation of the Puruṣasūkta, and a salutation. Devotion (*bhakti*) to Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa should accompany the practice of ritual and meditation (COLAS 1996: 25-26).

¹²³ COLAS 1996: 23; citing VIII, 11, p. 120, l. 10-13.

¹²⁴ COLAS 1996: 23.

ship of a physical one in home shrines and possibly temples. This is similar to ideas in the Vāstusūtra-Upaniṣad.

As I have noted, some branches of the Yajurveda tradition had long been associated with the south. It is conceivable that *caṅkam* references to the *munivar* (from Sanskrit *muni*: silent one or ascetic) and *pārppār* or *antaṇar* (seers), and their fire rituals could allude to this tradition. Two prevailing images of Brāhmaṇa ascetics in northern Brahmanical texts, in contrast to those of Buddhist and Jaina ascetics, are their matted hair and their fire rituals. The Brāhmaṇas mentioned in one *caṅkam* text have these features.¹²⁵ These southern Brāhmaṇa ascetics or ascetic-householders might have been forerunners of the community that produced the Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra.

Links could be made between this text, too, and the Ālvār tradition. I am thinking here primarily of the Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra's focus on Nārāyaṇa and the ways in which it links mental and physical visualization of the image, its view of the deity as having many forms, its link between temple worship and Vedic rituals, its link between visualizing images and chanting *stotras*, its style of worship (including the offering of flowers, *mantras*, and salutations), and its inclusion or fusion of both ascetic and householder traditions – all of which are diagnostic features of *bhakti* hymns.¹²⁶

A Rgvedic Influence?

Śaunaka's R̥gvidhāna (literally, the sacred precepts or sorcery practice of the *rc*) might be yet another antecedent to the Ālvār hymns, but probably a more indirect one than the works that I have already mentioned. It belongs to a tradition of simplifying the rituals of the Śrauta- and Gṛhyasūtras and promoting the magical effects of chanting *mantras* (the attainment of prosperity, long life, peace, progeny, and so forth). It is difficult to date this work. M.S. BHAT thinks that the oldest stratum might have been pre-Pāṇinian (that is, before the fifth century BCE) and that its Smṛti and Tantric sections might have been added hundreds of years later, between the first cen-

¹²⁵ Narrīṇai 141.3-5; see also BRONKHORST 1993: 35; 51.

¹²⁶ COLAS 1996: 60; 63.

ture and the fifth.¹²⁷ The extant text dates from some time between the fifth century and the eighth (although BHAT argues that one section – the *Puruṣasūktavidhāna* by Viṣṇukumāra, which is of particular interest here – probably existed independently and was added only by the ninth century).¹²⁸

According to the *Puruṣasūktavidhāna*,¹²⁹ “in water, in fire, in the heart, in the sun, in the altar (*sthaṇḍila*) and in images (*pratimā*) – in these, the proper worship (*arcana*) of Hari has been declared by the *munis*.”¹³⁰ This section states that its topics are worship (*arcana*), hymns of praise (*stotra*), chanting the divine names (*japa*), sacrifice (*homa*), and asceticism (*yoga*) – an intriguing juxtaposition, from my historical perspective. Worship includes the application of *nyāsa*, first to the body of a worshipper and then to that of the deity. This is followed by offering a seat, water, cloth, sacred thread, sandal wood paste, flower, incense, lighted lamps, and food, salutation, and circumambulation. A worshipper might offer these to a mental image, rather than an actual one, because he may mentally conjure up (*kalpayet*) a lotus-seat for Nārāyaṇa in the midst of fire and meditate (*cintayet*) on the chief god among gods.

The *Puruṣasūktavidhāna* makes several striking references to fearing *saṃsāra* and to attaining refuge (*śaraṇam prāpya*) at the feet of the deity – ideas that later became popular among both the Ālvārs and Śrīvaiṣṇavas.

“The wise, on attaining the refuge in thee alone, cross over the awful and endless (*ananta*) ocean of existence which is a [veritable] receptacle of afflictions (*kleśabhājana*).”¹³¹

¹²⁷ On the problem of authorship, stratifications, and date see BHAT 1987: 7; 14; 16; 19; 95; 146-149.

¹²⁸ BHAT 1987: 149-152. All translations of the *Rgvidhāna* are by BHAT unless otherwise noted.

¹²⁹ *Rgvidhāna* 3.155-170.

¹³⁰ YOUNG translating from the Sanskrit text of *Rgvidhāna* 3.150: *apsv agnau hrdaye sūrye sthaṇḍile pratimāsu ca | śaṭsv eteṣu hareḥ sam-yagarcanaṃ munibhiḥ smṛtam ||*.

¹³¹ *Rgvidhāna* 3.177: *saṃsārasāgaram ghoram anantaṃ kleśabhājanam | tvām eva śaraṇam prāpya nistaranti maṇiṣiṇaḥ ||*.

“I am afraid of this formidable existence (*saṃsāra*), O chief among the gods! Protect me, O Lotus-eyed one! [for] I do not know [thy] highest abode. Thou pervadest, O Acyuta!, in all periods and in all directions [and even] in [my] body. A great fear is [in store] for me even in my future lives since there is no [refuge] other than thy lotus-like feet. After gaining this discernment and acquiring this abode, let this not fail me, O Lord! even in my next life [for this] wish of mine, who am born in misfortune, belongs to Thee. I shall always remain contented with that much provided it [discernment or abode] does not get lost [for] I exclusively pine indeed for the ... [two] feet of Viṣṇu in all [future] lives.”¹³²

The *Puruṣasūktavidhāna*¹³³ goes on to describe ascetic practices in the forest, such as muttering the *Puruṣasūkta*, and then mentions that a virtuous person should remain a householder (*grhastha*) but get up after midnight to meditate. (This suggests that the householder need not wait until becoming a formal *vānaprasthīn* to get on with the business of *yoga*.) After this, the *Puruṣasūktavidhāna* expounds on more yogic practices with their mundane and supramundane results. As if *yoga* were too onerous a task, the text has a strong *bhakti* message, which, in fact, trumps other spiritual practices and promises the fulfilment of all desires. One should not “lessen *bhakti* even if one does not [fully] accomplish [one’s object, for] the Highest Person, the Divine One is known to be sympathetic to His devotees.”¹³⁴ In fact, this *bhakti* element dominates the conclusion of the *Puruṣasūktavidhāna*:

“After adoring the adorable feet of Nārāyaṇa, whoever merely recites this hymn [of praise] attains the abode of the ever-lasting

¹³² *Rgvidhāna* 3.181-185: *aham bhīto ’smi deveśa saṃsāre ’smin mahābhaye | trāhi mām puṇḍarikākṣa na jāne paramaṃ padam || 181 kāleṣv api ca sarveṣu dikṣu sarvāsu cācyuta | śarīre ca gataś cāsi vartate me mahadbhayam || 182 tvatpādakamalād anyan na me janmāntareṣv api | vijñānam yad idaṃ prāpya yad idaṃ sthānam arjitaṃ || 183 janmāntare ’pi me deva mā bhūd asya parikṣayaḥ | durgatāv api jātasya tvadgato me manorathaḥ || 184 yadi nāśaṃ na vindeta tāvatāsmi kṛtī sadā | kāmāye viṣṇupādau tu sarvajanmasu kevalam || 185.*

¹³³ *Rgvidhāna* 3.187-193.

¹³⁴ *Rgvidhāna* 3.219: *anāsādayamāno ’pi bhaktim na parihāpayet | bhaktānukampī bhagavān chrūyate puruṣottamaḥ ||*

Viṣṇu, free from old age and death, by means of that excellent recitation. The wise regularly worship[s] Hari by means of a burnt-offering in the fire, by means of flowers in the water, by means of meditation in the heart and by means of a muttered prayer in the orb of the sun. A *bilva* leaf, a *śamī* leaf, a leaf of the *bhṛṅgāraka*, and the [flowers of] the jasmine *kuśa* and lotus – [all this ...] instantly gratifies Hari.”¹³⁵

“When [the means of gratification such as] leaves, flowers, fruits and water which [can be] obtained free (*akṛitalabdha*) are always existent and when the Primaeval Person who is attainable by mere devotion [is in existence], why [is] no effort ... made for the sake of deliverance [from births and deaths]?”¹³⁶

Even though the dating and provenance of the *Puruṣasūkta-vidhāna* are problematic, its general ethos is like that of the *Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra*. At least as an independent text, before being added to the *Ṛgvidhāna*, it could date from the same period (between the fourth century and the fifth). It has the same juxtaposition of Vedic *homa*, Nārāyaṇa asceticism, and meditative *pūjā* within its framework of the four *āśramas*. Just as daily worship in the *Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra* includes recitation of the *Puruṣasūkta*, so does the *Puruṣasūktavidhāna*. It, too, links the *Puruṣasūkta* with Nārāyaṇa.

In addition, though, it has some elements that are strikingly similar to those of the Ālvars. The text alludes to the *avatāras*, for instance, when it remarks that God has no colour, form, weapons, or abode yet appears in human form for his devotees.¹³⁷ The concept of attaining refuge (*śaraṇam prāpya*) links chanting hymns of praise (here, the *Puruṣasūkta*) with mundane and supramundane rewards. “The hymn of the *Puruṣa* [in praise] of Hari is conducive to heaven

¹³⁵ *Ṛgvidhāna* 3.225-227: *etat tu yaḥ paṭhati kevalam eva sūktam nārāyaṇasya caraṇāṁ abhivandya vandyau | pāṭhena tena paramena sanātanasya sthānam jarāmaraṇavarjitaṁ eti viṣṇoḥ || 225 haviṣāgnau jale puṣpair dhyānena hr̥daye harim | yajanti sūrayo nityam japena ravimaṇḍale || 226 bilvapatraṁ śamīpatraṁ patraṁ bhṛṅgārakasya ca | mālātikusāpadmaṁ ca sadyas tuṣṭikaraṁ hareḥ || 227.*

¹³⁶ *Ṛgvidhāna* 3.229: *patraiś ca puṣpaiś ca phalaiś ca toyair akrītalabdhaiś ca sadaiva satsu | bhaktyaikalabhye puruṣe purāṇe muktyai kim arthaṁ kriyate na yatnaḥ ||.*

¹³⁷ *Ṛgvidhāna* 3.178.

and wealth and productive of fame [for] this is [in itself] the sacred knowledge of the soul and the highest knowledge of *yoga*.”¹³⁸ As I have already said in my earlier discussion of the *stotra* as a diagnostic feature of religious Śrīvaiṣṇavism, the same thing is said in *bhakti* hymns in what are known as *phalaśrutis*: concluding stanzas that encourage devotees to chant hymns of praise as a kind of mental devotion for any purpose. The Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra’s reference to conjuring up (*kalpayate*) the image form is strikingly similar to the language used by Rāmānuja in his commentary on BhG 4.11, which I have already discussed: “after they have portrayed me in [their] imagination (*saṃkalpya*) in whatever way (*yathā*) suits their own desires (*svāpekṣā*), they too, take refuge (*prapadyante/samāśrayante*) in me.” Finally, this text makes *bhakti* superior to *yoga* by virtue of its easy accessibility, although it maintains deep links with meditation and asceticism.

A Mahāyāna Influence?

I cannot explain some key aspects of Āḷvār poems by any Vedic or Tamil *caṅkam* oriented text. I am thinking here of their intense proselytism: telling devotees to worship this one deity by any of his names and forms, travel about to his shrines, memorize his hymns, and invite everyone to become a devotee. I am thinking also of sectarian exclusivity; even the Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra had included worship of other deities, although Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa was the focus. I think that proselytism and sectarianism are influences that entered Tamilnadu by way of the region directly north of Tamilnadu, what is known today as Andhra and Karnataka, or the Deccan. And I think that they developed there in rivalry with Mahāyāna Buddhism (but also Śaivism, which was emerging as a popular, temple-oriented religion at the same time).

These Āḷvār hymns invite ordinary people to take refuge with Nārāyaṇa and worship in order to fulfil all desires and attain heaven as well. Taking refuge had long been a major theme in Theravāda Buddhism as with the key phrase: I go to the Buddha (*buddha*), his teaching (*dhamma*), and his community (*saṅgha*) for refuge (*sara-*

¹³⁸ Rgvidhāna 3.186: *puruṣasya hareḥ sūktam svargyaṃ dhanyaṃ yaśaskaram | ātmajñānam idaṃ puṇyaṃ yogajñānam idaṃ param ||*

ṇa). Mahāyāna Buddhism conferred similar importance on taking refuge. Although scholars debate today whether monastics or lay people began this movement (with scholarly consensus building around the former),¹³⁹ the latter certainly grew in importance. Even at the time of the early Buddhist Saṅgha, the word *upāsaka*, for lay person, meant one who serves; in contrast, the word *bhikkhu* meant one who begs. Mahāyāna emphasized compassion (*mahākaruṇā*), which promises refuge, protection, and service to all beings – ideas that were attractive to ordinary people. A third-century work, *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*, “The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti,” became massively popular among all Buddhists during the following centuries. In it, the *bodhisattva* assumes the guise of a layperson and tirelessly serves all human beings. Buddhists linked taking refuge with the Buddha and service to all.

In the fourth century CE, members of the Viṣṇukunḍin dynasty in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa were devotees of Nārāyaṇa. HANUMANTHA RAO argues that “the Śrīpārvatasvāmī of the Viṣṇukunḍin records [is] none other than the Buddha, who has already become a Bhagavān, and is probably in the process of becoming an incarnation of Viṣṇu.”¹⁴⁰ And one Mahāyāna work, the *Lalitavistara*, calls the Buddha Nārāyaṇa, Mahānārāyaṇa, and Mahāpuruṣa.¹⁴¹ Evidence indicates that Viṣṇukunḍins competed with Buddhists not only by integrating aspects of Buddha into Nārāyaṇa but also by converting Buddhists using the *hiraṇyagarbha* ritual. It indicates in addition that Viṣṇukunḍins were influenced by Vaiṣṇavism under the Gupta dynasty. The Vaiṣṇava Gupta kings of Mathurā (319-415), who popularized the *avatāras*, had direct influence in the Deccan via marriage into the Vākāṭaka dynasty and via that dynasty into the Viṣṇukunḍins. The latter were connected, in turn, with the Pallavas.¹⁴²

This might explain some of the overlap that links Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu and his *avatāras*, with Buddha. An inscription from the same

¹³⁹ See summary of the discussion in SASAKI 1999; see also WILLIAMS 1989; HIRAKAWA 1990.

¹⁴⁰ RAO 1973: 250 [I have changed the verb tenses].

¹⁴¹ RAO 1973: 128 citing in notes 130 [sic 139], 140, 141 on p. 136 *Lalitavistara* Ch. XV.202; XXI.221; XV.229; XXII.353; XXVI.426.

¹⁴² MAJUMDAR/ALTEKAR 1986: 64-73; 93-126; 229-234.

century (the fourth) and region (Andhra) refers, for instance, to a *devakula* (a “family” of the god) of Bhagavat Nārāyaṇa.¹⁴³ The concept of family here, a community of devotees, is similar to the Buddhist *upāsakasāṅgha* (the order of lay people). Mahāyāna had lay organizations, too, called *bodhisattvagaṇas*; these made a link between acts of charity and enlightenment.¹⁴⁴ Could these ideas, that of a lay community and that of service as a path to liberation, have entered the Nārāyaṇa cult in the Deccan and eventually influenced the Ālvārs? After all, the latter did make a link between serving – the deity and other devotees – and reaching heaven. Other possible links include iconographical features of both Nārāyaṇa and Buddha: the reclining posture, say, or the emphasis on their feet.

Before leaving the Buddhist connection, one other observation is in order. *stotras* that praise the body of Buddha were already present in the Lakkhaṇasutta of the Dīghanikāya of the Pāli Canon (ca. third century BCE) and, somewhat later, in the Catuḥśatakastotra and the Śatapañcāśatikastotra of Māṛceta (third century CE); the latter gained popularity all over India within the next several centuries. During the fourth century, the Hindu king Hastivarman of the Śālaṅkāyana dynasty (in what is now the Godavari and Krishna districts in Andhra) granted land for “meeting the expenses of the worship of the God Nārāyaṇa.... The inscription describes Bhagavat Nārāyaṇa as one who lies on the seven seas, is sung in the seven Sāman hymns, and is the sole possessor of the seven worlds.”¹⁴⁵ The “seven Sāman hymns” allude probably to the Sāma Veda and to Vedic *stotras*, which are sung to the deity in the temple.

Although Nārāyaṇa worship might have entered Tamilnadu from many parts of the Deccan, one portal was certainly from this same area of eastern Andhra. The first reference to Māyōṇ as Nārāyaṇa in Tamil literature occurs in the Perumpāṇāruppaṭai (ca. 190–200 CE). It focuses on the city of Kāñcī and its environs and provides a divine genealogy for the Toṇṭaimaṇ ruler, who might have migrated from eastern Andhra. (In Tamil legends, he is an outsider.)

¹⁴³ KRISHNA 1980: 102.

¹⁴⁴ ROSEN 1980: 115.

¹⁴⁵ All three divine epithets occur in Raghuvamśa 10.21. This suggests that Nārāyaṇa motifs were entering several poetic traditions. See JAINSWAL 1967: 206.

This work alludes not only to Nārāyaṇa's association with the cosmic ocean but also to his presence in a temple, where a Tamil bard sings his praises, accompanied by the *yāl*. This is the first *caṅkam* work in which a bard eulogizes a deity instead of a human ruler and is therefore an extremely important antecedent of the Ālvār hymns. It is conceivable that the hymn in praise of Māyōṇ is directed to the deity of the Vēhka temple in Kāñcī; it has a reclining Nārāyaṇa image, which was mentioned by the earliest Ālvār, Poykai. The Pallavas, who might also have migrated to eastern Tamilnadu from the area of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, had connections with both Buddhism (two kings were named Buddhavarman and Buddhayaṅkūra) and Nārāyaṇa (the wife of Buddhavarman gave land to a temple of Nārāyaṇa at Dalur). The Pallavas took control, it seems, from the Toṇṭai rulers in the area of Kāñcī in the fourth century.

This tentative connection between Mahāyāna Buddhism and a Nārāyaṇa community of devotees helps to account for the popularity, though not necessarily the origin, of various themes in Ālvār poetry: refuge, service, feet, *stotras* of the body of the deity, image worship, the ordinary person (lay or devotee), and the community of devotees. Because emphasis on sectarianism and proselytism were new elements in sixth-century Tamilnadu, their immediate source was probably outside Tamilnadu – although immigrants might have already introduced some Nārāyaṇa and Kṛṣṇa worship (the latter in the region of Maturai).¹⁴⁶

But what made these themes of enough interest in Tamilnadu to spark a major religious movement, the *bhakti* movement? I can think of three explanations. The most important one is that newcomers from the Deccan, such as Buddhists or Digambara Jinas, converted a king or two and provoked fear among local Tamil Brāhmaṇas of losing political influence – especially if these new Buddhist and Jaina rulers abrogated some customary privileges, which might be at the heart of the story of the Kalabhra Interregnum.¹⁴⁷ Brāhma-

¹⁴⁶ The similarity of names, Mathurā (the city where Kṛṣṇa was born) and Maturai (its Tamilized equivalent), suggests a migration or at least an interest in linking the two places.

¹⁴⁷ In the seventh century, the Pallava king Mahendravarman and the Pāṇṭya king Kūṇ-Pāṇṭya (Neṭumāraṇ) were Jinas. Although a long-standing Jaina community already existed in Tamilnadu, Digambara Jaina mi-

ṇas living in Tamilnadu might have been receptive to a new proselytizing movement, therefore, with Vedic connections. Another explanation is that Tamil society had long enjoyed a cosmopolitan integration of its many communities and social strata; the *bhakti* movement was in tune with this Tamil ethos. Still another explanation is that Tamil *caṅkam* poetry provided a key component for a proselytizing movement: tropes that praised Tamil language, culture, and land. I suggest that some Tamil Brāhmaṇas approved of this effort to end the political influence of recently arrived Buddhists and Jains by amalgamating their knowledge of *caṅkam* poetry and their style of meditation and worship of Nārāyaṇa in homes and temples with the Buddhist-influenced Nārāyaṇa cult from the north. The resulting fusion was a new devotional genre and proselytizing movement.

If my historical reconstruction is correct, southern Brāhmaṇa spirituality was already imbued with religious expressions of humility and equality (or reversals of the usual *varṇa* hierarchy). This might have proved useful in the Āḷvār temple milieu, a proselytizing tradition that was eager to reach people across the social spectrum. This helps me explain why “service” in the hymns is linked with expressions of humility. Nammāḷvār’s *Tiruvāymoḷi* mentions being “lower than even a *cantāla*” and often mentions being the “servant of the servant of the servant.”¹⁴⁸ Because Brāhmaṇas were at the top of the caste system elsewhere, and because they had been criticized for centuries by Buddhists and Jains for their exclusivity and arrogance, Tamil Brāhmaṇas had an advantage when popularizing their religion by presenting it as inclusive and egalitarian – a tradition that they came to genuinely thanks to Atharvaveda and Yajurveda traditions.

grants – perhaps from places in the Deccan during the fifth and sixth centuries – might have disturbed the status quo. And Buddhist migrants at that time might have contributed to this perception that outsiders were taking over. Clues in the Vēḷviki grant in the Pāṇṭya kingdom – legends about the Buddhist ruler Accutavikkanta, who locked up the southern kings – allude to an intrusive power linked with the Kalabhras (who have never been precisely identified). If they did indeed exist, they might have abrogated some Brahmanical rights and therefore prompted a reaction. See PETERSON 1989: 10-12, 19-20, 122, 141, 164-165, 231, 244, 259, 276-281, 289-296; HIKOSAKA 1989: 21-22.

¹⁴⁸ See *Tiruvāymoḷi* 3.7.9 and 6.9.11.

This helped them contribute to an atmosphere of *communitas* and counter the pan-Indian Brahmanical reputation for being exclusive and hierarchical. Toward this end, they might have tried to keep the Vedas as a general (Hindu) symbol of status but not associate them explicitly with temples. Hence their praise for *villages* where Brāhmaṇas chant the Vedas. *brahmadeyas* (Brāhmaṇa villages), also known as *caturvedimaṅgalams*, were often located near temples. Still, it might not have been easy for all Brāhmaṇas, especially newcomers, to take the radical step of serving non-Brāhmaṇa devotees, especially after the political tide had turned by the thirteenth century (Jainas and Buddhists no longer being threats).

PĀÑCARĀTRA AND THE ĀCĀRYAS

How and when did Pāñcarātra become established in many Vaiṣṇava temples of Tamilnadu? Assuming that it did not exist in the Ālvār temples, the easy answer is that Yāmuna established Pāñcarātra, at least at Śrīraṅgam, because he defends it in his Āgamaprāmāṇya. Once this tradition was established there, so the argument goes, it spread to other Vaiṣṇava temples in Tamilnadu.

But this answer presents several problems. (1) The Āgamaprāmāṇya itself does not describe its author as a founder; rather, it suggests that this kind of temple worship was already well established by royal decree. (2) It does not refer to Tamilnadu aside from a final passage honouring Nāthamuni,¹⁴⁹ who was traditionally the first Brāhmaṇa Ācārya in the Śrīvaiṣṇava lineage. But it does refer once to the Treatise on the Validity of Kāśmīrāgama,¹⁵⁰ which might have been used by the author as a source for many of his ideas and might imply a link with Kashmir. (3) We have hardly any inscriptional evidence of Pāñcarātra temple priests in Tamilnadu before the fifteenth century (although there is one eleventh-century reference to Mahāpāñcarātrin students in a Vedic college connected with a Vaiṣṇava temple and one to Śrībhāgavata *nampis*, who might be Pāñcarātra priests).¹⁵¹ We have a growing number of references, however, to

¹⁴⁹ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 121-122 para 139.

¹⁵⁰ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 120-121 para 138.

¹⁵¹ The influence of the Āgamas on Śaiva temples in Tamilnadu needs to be studied separately and compared to the influence of the Āgamas on

specific Pāñcarātra-Āgamas by Śrīvaiṣṇava authors from the twelfth century. It is therefore difficult to know when Pāñcarātrins became an established priesthood in Tamil Vaiṣṇava temples. (4) The Āgamaprāmāṇya refers to a context of intense competition, even animosity, between Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Pāñcarātra temple priests and Smārta Brāhmaṇas, but the inscriptions in Tamilnadu indicate harmony among Brāhmaṇas and other groups between the tenth century and mid-thirteenth. There could still have been conflict, but that possibility goes against the inscriptional record and is, once again, an argument from silence. (5) Even to this day, there are more Vaikhānasa temples than Pāñcarātra ones, even though both are associated with Śrīvaiṣṇavism.¹⁵²

Nāthamuni and Yāmuna: Some Background

In this section, I discuss the date of Yāmuna (and his grandfather Nāthamuni),¹⁵³ describe references to Brāhmaṇas in the Āgamaprāmāṇya; and compare its depiction of Nāthamuni to that of the Stotratatna, another work attributed to Yāmuna.

The question of dating: We have no internal evidence for dates in the works ascribed to Nāthamuni and Yāmuna or those of other early Ācāryas. According to K.A. NILAKANTA SASTRI, “If Śrīnātha who seems to be mentioned in the Anbil plates may be taken to be the same as the Vaiṣṇava Saint Nāthamuni, his age would be the end of the ninth and the beginning of the ten centuries A.D...”¹⁵⁴ For further substantiation he points out that Nāthamuni’s birthplace is called Vīranārāyaṇapuram; this recalls a surname of Parāntaka I. He then mentions the Divyasūricarita and other hagiographies about how Nāthamuni collected the hymns. But this identification has several problems. We do not know whether Śrīnātha is Nāthamuni or wheth-

Vaiṣṇava temples. Despite the similarities of Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva hymns, the Āgamic influence on both could have led to quite different trajectories.

¹⁵² See H. DANIEL SMITH, The ‘108’ Vaishnava Sthalas: a preliminary report (unpublished manuscript).

¹⁵³ Yāmuna refers to *pitāmahaṃ nāthamunim* in Stotratatna 65.

¹⁵⁴ NILAKANTA SASTRI ²1955: 638.

er Śrīnātha of the Anbil plates even lived at Vīranārāyaṇapuram. If Aniruddha of the Anbil plates is the grandson of Śrīnātha, then this should make him a brother of Yāmuna but there is no connection made between the two. Moreover, if Vīranārāyaṇapuram is named after Parāntaka I who ruled 907 to 955 and Nāthamuni was born in a town by that name, then he must have been born some time in the first half of the tenth century at the very earliest but could have lived in the second half of the tenth century instead. Because according to some hagiographies, he was not alive when Yāmuna was born, he likely died before 1050. This might place Nāthamuni in the latter part of the tenth century and first part of the eleventh, possibly 980-1040.

The modern scholar ROQUE MESQUITA¹⁵⁵ dated Yāmuna to the tenth or early eleventh century because of one reference to a Cōla king in his *Samvitsiddhi*.¹⁵⁶ Because the word *saṃrāj* refers to a king who reigns over many other kings, he thought, the reference might be either to Rājarāja, who reigned 984/985-1012, or to his son Rājendra I, because the Cōla kingdom began to decay after his time. But according to ORR,¹⁵⁷ this is very weak evidence. Such a powerful king could have been Parāntaka I, who ruled from 907 to 955 over the Pāñtyas, Bāṇas, Vaidumbas, and others. Or he could have been any of the kings who ruled after Rājarāja. Kulottuṅga I (r. 1070-1120), for instance, is said to have conquered the Western Cālukhyas, Pāñtyas, Cēras, and Kaliṅgas. Vikrama (r. 1118-1135) is called the overlord of a long list of kings and chiefs in the *Vikramacōlaṇ-ula*. Even his successors, Kulottuṅga II (r. 1133-1150) and Rājarāja II (r. 1146-1173), notes ORR, were major kings despite some weakening of power. If we do consider the word *saṃrāj* significant for identifying a Cōla king as Yāmuna's contemporary, I conclude, the latter could have lived at any time between the early tenth century and the mid twelfth.

WALTER NEEVEL assigned Yāmuna to the first half of the eleventh century. According to a hagiography, he defeated the chief priest (*purohita*) of the Cōla king in a debate, and his queen granted Yāmuna land as a prize. NEEVEL then suggested that this king was

¹⁵⁵ MESQUITA 1973.

¹⁵⁶ *Samvitsiddhi* 38-40.

¹⁵⁷ ORR: personal communication.

Rājendra I or Gaṅgaikoṇḍacōḷa (1012-1044);¹⁵⁸ that the land was near his capital at Gaṅgaikoṇḍacōḷa, presumably the village Vīra-nārāyaṇapuram (Kāṭṭu-mannār-kuṭi) that has been associated with Yāmuna until this day; and that the name Yāmuna was derived from the local deity (Mannār: Kṛṣṇa), who is associated with the Yamunā river.

But this historical reconstruction, too, presents several problems. First, based on comparative studies, it is a common feature of hagiographies to associate a “saint” with a king,¹⁵⁹ and this is true of the hagiographical genre in India as well. Second, Hindu hagiographies often refer to intellectual competitions in the courts of kings; these establish the intellectual supremacy of Brāhmaṇas. For this reason, stories connecting Yāmuna with the Cōḷa king, and stories about an intellectual competition should probably not be taken literally. Third, it is just as possible that Nāthamuni lived during the period of Rājendra I or Gaṅgaikoṇḍacōḷa (1012-1044), as some hagiographic accounts suggest. Keep in mind that the hagiographies were produced much later. The extant Guruparamparāprabhāvam 6000 probably dates from late fourteenth or fifteenth century and the Divyasūricarita about the thirteenth.¹⁶⁰ In any case, CARMAN has

¹⁵⁸ NEEVEL 1977: 83; he says that his account is based on the Guruparamparāprabhāvams 6000 and 3000.

¹⁵⁹ “Māṇikkavācakar was associated with a Pandyan king, Tirumaṅkaiyālvār with a Pallava king, Śaṅkara with a Kerala king, and Caitanya with a Muslim ruler of Bengal. In fact, so important was the association of saint and king for lateral legitimation, that Nabhaji, who wrote about the life of Mīrabai, noted that both Emperor Akbar and the saint Tulsī Dās came to pay homage to her. We know, however, that Akbar and Tulsī Dās were contemporaries of Nabhaji and lived nearly a century after Mīrabāi’s birth.” (YOUNG/MILLER 1990: 140).

¹⁶⁰ HARDY 1983: 243 argues that most of the hagiographies such as the Guruparamparāprabhāvam 6000 are based on the Divyasūricarita. This point was originally argued by T.A. GOPINATHA RAO in his History of Sri Vaisnavas (see B.V. RAMANUJAN 1973: 14 n. 4); he noted that the author must have been a contemporary of Rāmānuja, for the text does not mention Rāmānuja’s life. RAMANUJAN (1973: 113-118) examines the whole problem of hagiographical chronology, concluding that the Divyasūricarita was not written by a contemporary of Rāmānuja. Because the author describes a *paramparā* and adds his name at the end, RAMANUJAN believes that the

rightly noted that the traditional dates presume that “leaders” of the early *sampradāya* lived to the age of 120 and are therefore suspect.¹⁶¹ These hagiographies, moreover, do not always agree with each other. Some connect a Cōla king who ruled at Gaṅgaikoṇḍacōlapuram with Nāthamuni; others connect him with Yāmuna.

CARMAN suggests that Rāmānuja lived between 1077 and 1157, because several verses in the Divyasūricārīta provide specific dates for events in his life: 1137-1138, when he left Śrīraṅgam, a sojourn that lasted eleven years; and 1155-1156, when he completed the Śrībhāṣya. CARMAN suggests that Rāmānuja’s commentary on the Gītā was later but also that Rāmānuja died in 1157.¹⁶² He offers no reason, though, for his quick demise. It certainly did not leave

author is later than Rāmānuja and trying to legitimate his own lineage by linking it with Rāmānuja as if he, the author of the Divyasūricārīta, were a contemporary of Rāmānuja (27). But if the Divyasūricārīta were indeed later than the time of Rāmānuja, this does not rule out the possibility that it was earlier than the Guruparamparāprabhāvam 6000 or that both of these texts had a common source. My own view is that: the Divyasūricārīta is probably the earliest hagiography because its main story of canonization refers only to Nammālvār’s four prapandhas and not the 4000 hymns (first mentioned explicitly by Vedāntadeśika). The latter were probably compiled by Periyavāccāṇ Piḷḷai who writes a commentary on them (or by someone just before him). In the Guruparamparāprabhāvam 6000, Pinṇaḷakiya Perumāl Jiyar includes a quote from the Ācāryahṛdayam of Aḷakiyamaṇavāla Perumāl Nāyaṇār (thirteenth century), one from the Saṅkalpasūryodaya of Vedāntadeśika (fourteenth century), and one from Lakṣmī Kāvya (fifteenth century). RAMANUJAN dismisses these as interpolations, but given other evidence that suggests a date after Vedāntadeśika’s time, these references might be an important clue for the dating of the Guruparamparāprabhāvam 6000 (see RAMANUJAN 1973: 49-50). The Periyatirumuṭi-āḷavu, which is assigned to the fifteenth century, mentions the Guruparamparāprabhāvam of Pinṇaḷakiya Perumāl Jiyar. It is conceivable that the extant Guruparamparāprabhāvam is a work of the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. The Guruparamparāprabhāvam 6000 might have an early strata because its stories of the lives of the Ācāryas end with Nampīḷḷai. In any case dating their lives is problematic because the author Pinṇaḷakiya Perumāl Jiyar presumed that the Ācāryas lived to the age of 120.

¹⁶¹ CARMAN 1974: 27.

¹⁶² CARMAN 1974: 62.

much time for writing his commentary on the *Gītā* and perhaps the *Gadyas*, which are closer to the *Gītā* than the *Śrībhāṣya* in spirit, and might also have been composed about the same time. Moreover, CARMAN offers no reason for his assertion that Rāmānuja was born in 1077.¹⁶³

Granted, Rāmānuja would have been a mature scholar when he wrote the *Śrībhāṣya* (three-fourths of it was purportedly completed by the time he left Śrīraṅgam in 1137). But he could have been forty rather than sixty. If so, he could have been born about the turn of the century and died by about 1180 or 1190. It is claimed that an image of him was placed in the Kāñcī temple by 1191. I would now date Rāmānuja between 1100 and 1170 or 1180.¹⁶⁴ This could mean that his predecessor, Yāmuna, died in about 1125 – if indeed he did die before meeting Rāmānuja, as some hagiographies claim – and could have been born about 1050. This would place Nāthamuni in the late tenth and eleventh century, perhaps between 980-1040. Yāmuna likely knew of Rāmānuja's reputation as a brilliant young scholar because of connections between Śrīraṅgam and Kāñcī, including family

¹⁶³ CARMAN, too, wants to align Rāmānuja with a persecuting Śaiva Cōḷa king. But because it has been difficult to make Kulottuṅga I into this figure – we have no record of him persecuting Vaiṣṇavas; in fact, he supported them along with Śaivas – the next ruler Vikrama-Cōḷa is said to be the mean Śaiva Cōḷa king. But we have no evidence that even this Cōḷa king persecuted Vaiṣṇavas. Rather, I think that Rāmānuja might have become embroiled in a conflict between Hoysāḷas and Cōḷas. Hoysāḷas began to invade Tamilnadu in the twelfth century and established a capital just outside Śrīraṅgam. For a history of the Hoysāḷas, see DERRETT 1957. Hoysāḷa king Viṣṇuvardhana reached Kāñcī in the early twelfth century (DERRETT 1957: 49-53); there is a fragmentary inscription of Viṣṇuvardhana at Śrīraṅgam in SII 24.258. Hagiographies refer to the fact that Rāmānuja fled to a Hoysāḷa kingdom. If Rāmānuja had sided for some reason with the Hoysāḷas, he might have had trouble with a Cōḷa ruler and had to flee. Because control of the Śrīraṅgam area shifted periodically from one dynasty to another – sometimes, Hoysāḷas also supported Cōḷas, whose names appear in inscriptions, against chiefs in northern Tamilnadu – Rāmānuja might have been able to return after eleven years or so. But it is also possible that rivalry among groups in the Śrīraṅgam temple caused Rāmānuja to leave.

¹⁶⁴ See note 230 for details.

connections of people within the circle of disciples.¹⁶⁵ When he was dying, according to one hagiography, Yāmuna instructed his disciples to persuade Rāmānuja to move to Śrīraṅgam.

There is an extremely important verse by Kūreśa, a contemporary of Rāmānuja, which reveals that he not only had a rudimentary concept of a lineage (*kula*, *vaṃśa*), which we could understand as a *sampradāya*, but also one that explicitly named the figures in this lineage going back in time: Rāmānuja to Yāmuna to Nāthamuni to Nammālvār to Śrī: “I have taken refuge at the feet of Rāmānuja the foremost light of the sage Yāmuna’s lineage (*kulapradīpaḥ ... yāmunamuneḥ*). Yāmuna is from the line of Nātha[muni] (*nāthavaṃśyaḥ*) and Nāthamuni is of the lineage of the sage Nammālvār who is the servant of [Śrī] Your Queen. That’s why, O Varada, You look upon me as Your very own!”¹⁶⁶ Although this verse establishes the relative succession of teachers, it does not indicate that Kūreśa (or his son Parāśarabhaṭṭar) knew Yāmuna personally and does not mention the works of Yāmuna. It seems reasonable to conclude that Yāmuna had died before Kūreśa and Rāmānuja were at Śrīraṅgam. Kūreśa (and later his son Parāśarabhaṭṭar), not Rāmānuja, was likely the one interested in lineage. In any case, I believe that the following are reasonable dates: 1100-1170 or 1180 for Rāmānuja, 1050-1125 for Yāmuna, and 980-1040 for Nāthamuni.

The authorship and date of the Āgamaprāmānya: With this provisional dating of the early Ācāryas in mind, I turn now to the Āgamaprāmānya, which is an explicit defense of Pāñcarātra temple Brāhmaṇas. It has been attributed to Yāmuna. Does it provide us with any clues to the development of a Pāñcarātra priesthood in Tamilnadu and its connection with Yāmuna?

¹⁶⁵ According to the hagiographies, Periyatirumalai Nampi, one of Yāmuna’s disciples, had a sister who was Rāmānuja’s mother (CARMAN 1974: 26-27). If this story is based on fact, he could have provided an indirect link between Yāmuna and Rāmānuja.

¹⁶⁶ Kūreśa, Varadarājastava 102: *rāmānujajamghriśaraṇo ’smi kulapradīpas tv āsīt sa yāmunamunes sa ca nāthavaṃśyaḥ | vaṃśyaḥ parāṅkuśamunes sa ca so ’pi devyāḥ dāsas taveti varadāsmi tavekṣaṇīyaḥ ||*, translated by NAYAR 1992: 104.

Vedāntadeśika (circa 1268-1369) twice quotes a passage of the Āgamaprāmāṇya¹⁶⁷ (the one that mentions the Kaśmīrāgamaprāmāṇya),¹⁶⁸ and so we know that it existed in Tamilnadu by his time.

The Āgamaprāmāṇya defends Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa temple priests who perform Pāñcarātra rituals against criticism by Smārtas¹⁶⁹ (Mīmāṃsakas, Naiyāyikas, and Vedāntins). The latter are associated with the three Vedas, scripturally required rituals such as *agnihotra*, *pūrṇadarśamāsa*, and *jyotiṣṭoma* (elsewhere described as rituals such as the *aindragneya*),¹⁷⁰ and rituals such as *aṣṭaka*, *ācamana*, and *saṃdhyā*.¹⁷¹

The author claims that Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas are similar to these Smārtas, because they have *gotras*¹⁷² and “are connected with the dharmas of the three Vedas, like the *sāvitrī* recitation.”¹⁷³ These Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas, he says, are learned *ācāryas* who study scriptures and teach; wear sacred threads, upper garments and hair-tufts; sacrifice; and receive priestly stipends.¹⁷⁴ They have a ritual tradition in addition to scriptural rituals, like the Smārtas, but it is a different one: “the means of attaining to the Bhagavān, viz. knowledge, cleansing the way to the Lord, preparation of worship and oblation, as enjoined by the Ekāyana scripture.”¹⁷⁵ Elsewhere, the author elaborates on this: “And in the present day we can also observe how exemplary persons of great learning, believing that these rites are most effective in attaining bliss, perform the rites of temple-building, erection of idols, prostration, circumambulation and par-

¹⁶⁷ MESQUITA 1973: 186.

¹⁶⁸ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 120-121 para 138.

¹⁶⁹ VAN BUITENEN (1971: 123 note 2) observes that “In the *pūrva-pakṣa* the principal opponents introduced are what one may already call smārta brahmins, and among them especially the orthodox followers of Mīmāṃsa.”

¹⁷⁰ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 121 para 138.

¹⁷¹ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 9 para 12.

¹⁷² VAN BUITENEN 1971: 102 para 122.

¹⁷³ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 121 para 138.

¹⁷⁴ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 101 para 121; 107 para 127.

¹⁷⁵ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 121 para 138.

ticular festival ceremonies, just as they perform the *agnihotra* and other rituals enjoined directly by Scripture.”¹⁷⁶ A similar list includes “the cleaning of the way to the idol, the preparation for worship, offering, daily study, and meditation.”¹⁷⁷ On one occasion, the author calls this daily ritual *pāñcakālīka*. And on several occasions, he mentions *dikṣā*¹⁷⁸ as the initiation that makes people eligible to perform this temple ritual. He identifies these Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas as belonging to the Vājasaneyasākhā of the White Yajurveda; they perform *samśkāras* in the tradition of Kātyāyana’s Grhyasūtras.¹⁷⁹

The author mentions an additional group of Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas, also belonging to the Vājasaneyasākhā. They perform *pūjā* only for themselves, not for others in the temple as a livelihood.¹⁸⁰ He makes this observation to enhance the orthodox status of Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas who are involved in temple worship, because there can be no question about the status of orthodox Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas who are *not*. He implies that they are virtually Smārtas. Thus, there are two groups of Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Vājasaneyins: those who perform rituals for others in the temple and those who do so for themselves alone.

This author acknowledges that the word “Bhāgavata” refers also to a general orientation. It is a synonym of Ekāyana. As I have said, he associates temple rituals with the name of a scripture: Ekāyana (which he does not describe with any specific markers but does say that its status as scripture has been defended in the Treatise on the Validity of Kāśmīrāgama – a text that modern scholars have not identified).¹⁸¹ Ekāyana is a synonym of Pāñcarātra (at least in

¹⁷⁶ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 100 para 119.

¹⁷⁷ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 109 para 129.

¹⁷⁸ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 15 para 17; 77 para 92; 79 para 94; 113 para 133.

¹⁷⁹ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 120 para 138. “Kātyāyana (...) was not only the founder of a ritual school of the White Yajurveda, but also the main organizer of the learning of the Vājasaneyin” (GONDA 1975: 331).

¹⁸⁰ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 109 para 129; 111 para 132.

¹⁸¹ It is difficult to know from this work who the Ekāyanas were. The author of the Āgamaprāmānya sometimes refers to the Ekāyana as a distinct group within the general definition of Ekāyana, which was also called

general usage), because these Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas also “perform daily the rites of the Pāñcarātra.”¹⁸² And Pāñcarātra, in turn, is identified by the author with Tantra¹⁸³ and Sātvata.¹⁸⁴

Pāñcarātra. Some passages allude to their identity as Brāhmaṇas, but they were no longer able to maintain a Vaidika lifestyle and probably belonged to no recognizable school of the Vedas (alluding only to a “lost” branch). RASTELLI (forthcoming) provides evidence from the Pāñcarātra-Saṃhitās that two groups existed: the Ekāyanas and “Vedic-orthodox Pāñcarātrins” belonging to the White Yajurveda. The authorship of some Pāñcarātra-Saṃhitās (or sections of them), she argues, can be assigned on the basis of these differing perspectives. She thinks that the Pārameśvarasaṃhitā and at least the first chapter of the *cāryapāda* of the Pādmasaṃhitā were written by the Ekāyanas, for instance, whereas most of the Pādmasaṃhitā was written by the Vaidikas. According to the Pārameśvarasaṃhitā, “initiated non-Ekāyanas” are also allowed to perform “the ritual for the sake of others.” The category “for the sake of others” is very close to the wording to the Āgama-prāmāṇya; it must refer to one group of Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas, the temple priests, who perform rituals for others. Sectarianism was stronger, thinks RASTELLI, in the Pādmasaṃhitā. According to both texts, Ekāyanas do not need *dīkṣā* and belong to the Āgasiddhānta (one of four divisions of the Pāñcarātra, which was the *dharma* of the *kṛtayuga* in the form of *śruti* and the teaching of “those who worship Vāsudeva exclusively”). By contrast, the Vaidikas say that they belong to the Mantrasiddhānta, which “traces back to 8,000 Brahmins who belonged to the Vedic schools (*śākhā*) of the Kāṇvas and Mādhyandinas of the White Yajurveda.” They perform the ritual that is “connected with the visualisation (*dhyāna*) of Viṣṇu and is characterized by His worship.” The descendents of these Brāhmaṇas are “called Bhāgavatas ... they possess ... the exclusive authority to perform the ritual for the sake of other (*parārtha*) persons by their order, meaning, in practise, the right to perform public temple worship.” RASTELLI suggests that the Pādmasaṃhitā was written before the thirteenth century, whereas the Pārameśvarasaṃhitā was probably written in South India between the twelfth century and the fourteenth. Vedāntadeśika, traditionally dated to 1270-1369, quotes from it. But to claim that it was from Tamilnadu I would want to see substantial documentation of the diagnostic features of Śrīvaiṣṇava religiosity that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter along with the distinctive features of Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy. (Of course, it could have been composed elsewhere in South India). Whether composed in Tamilnadu or not, I suspect that the Pārameśvarasaṃhitā largely drew on a pan-Indian genre rather than a specific Tamil milieu.

¹⁸² VAN BUITENEN 1971: 10 para 13.

This broad definition of Bhāgavata (= Ekāyana = Pāñcarātra = Tantra = Sātvata) creates some difficulties for the author, because some groups belonging to the general orientation – for instance, the *vaiśya vrātyas* or *sātvatas*¹⁸⁵ – have often been considered low in status.¹⁸⁶ They clean the temple or guard it,¹⁸⁷ by royal decree.¹⁸⁸ The author's hermeneutic is twofold. He defends them as legitimate members of this Bhāgavata-Pāñcarātra-Ekāyana-Tantra-Sātvata tradition but also distinguishes them from the Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa group. The latter is a subdivision with differences, including most of the diagnostic features of orthodox Smārta Brahmanism and, as I have mentioned, Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas are subdivided, in turn, into those who do rituals for others and those who do rituals only for themselves. Occasionally, the author indulges in word plays to achieve this goal. Thus, there are Sātvatas – i.e. Pāñcarātras in general but also a special group of Brāhmaṇa Sātvatas –, so called because they are pure (*sattva*) and therefore unlike those (lower status) Sātvatas who clean the temple.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸³ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 1-2, para 4; 74 para 87; 95 para 115.

¹⁸⁴ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 122 para 139; 124 note 11.

¹⁸⁵ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 109, para 128.

¹⁸⁶ Remember, SHARMA connected the *vrātyas* and *dāsas* with the Yajurveda; if they were on the margins of Vedic society, they might well have been a group that was remembered as Brāhmaṇa but that no longer practiced a Vedic orthodox life-style (SHARMA 2000). It is conceivable that some of them had contributed to the development of the Pāñcarātra temple traditions. Those among them of higher status might have claimed to be Ekāyanas of the lost Vedic *śākhā*, and those of lower status might have been viewed as temple servants.

¹⁸⁷ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 109 para 129.

¹⁸⁸ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 12 para 15.

¹⁸⁹ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 109 para 129; see also 11-12 para 15, 16. NEEVEL 1977: 30-37 divides the Bhāgavatas into four classes: servants; professional, initiated, priests (*arcakas*); Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas who perform worship only for themselves; and Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas who follow both Pāñcarātra and Vedic karma.

I disagree with NEEVEL's distinction between professional initiated priests (*arcakas*), presumably the temple priests who have *dīkṣā*, and Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas who follow both Pāñcarātra and Vedic *karmans*. I see

RASTELLI thinks that Yāmuna was likely an “orthodox” Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa, who belonged to the Vājasaneyasākhā. She bases her view on the common assumption that Yāmuna is the author of the Āgamaprāmāṇya and the author’s identification of himself with the Vājasaneyins. I agree with her that the author of the Āgamaprāmāṇya can be identified as a Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Vājasaneyin. I also think that Yāmuna authored this work. Although the Āgamaprāmāṇya does not reflect the social and temple milieu of Tamilnadu as known from the inscriptions and texts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, I am convinced that he was the author of the Āgamaprāmāṇya, for the following reasons.

Comparing several verses of the Stotraratna and the Āgamaprāmāṇya, I find some important similarities. First is the fusion of *yoga* and *bhakti*: The Āgamaprāmāṇya says, “May Nāthamuni be victorious, he to whom the Three Principles are immediately evident by virtue of his own miraculous power ... he whose spirit is for ever the abode of the feet of Mukunda.”¹⁹⁰ The Stotraratna contains the fol-

them as the same in the temple context and distinguish them from the Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas who perform worship only for themselves (a home worship).

RASTELLI points out that “NEEVEL does not see that this group belongs to the White Yajurveda (Yāmuna calls it Vājasaneyasākhā); he thinks that the Ekāyanasākhā, the other group mentioned by Yāmuna, is a part of the Vājasaneyasākhā” (RASTELLI: personal communication). She identifies four groups: (1) temple servants who are not true Bhāgavatas, because they have no *dikṣā* and merely work in the temple; (2) temple priests who have *dikṣā*; (3) Ekāyanas who have abandoned (Brahmanical) *trayīdharma* and follow their own *sākhā*; and (4) Vājasaneyasākhā Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas.

I differ from RASTELLI, however, by identifying one branch of the Vājasaneyasākhā Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas with her *dikṣā* Brāhmaṇas who perform temple rituals. But I recognize another branch of Vājasaneyasākhā Brāhmaṇas who do not perform temple rituals (i.e., they perform only home *pūjās* and consider themselves even more orthodox, virtually Smārtas). In sum, I think that there are four groups: (1) Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas (= Vājasaneyins), who have *dikṣā* and perform temple rituals for others; (2) Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas (= Vājasaneyins), who perform *pūjā* only for themselves; (3) Ekāyanas (Brāhmaṇas – or those claiming Brāhmaṇa status – of unknown Vedic *sākhā*, who have some temple involvement; and (4) temple servants.

¹⁹⁰ VAN BUITENEN 1971: 121-122 para 139.

lowing phrases: “Homage to the sage (*muni*) Nātha ... In whom dwells the fullness of both knowledge and dispassion (*vairāgya*) beyond imagination, wondrous and unstained” and “Homage to him who has attained the ultimate in the greatness of his love for and knowledge of the lotus-feet of Madhujit (Viṣṇu), to the lord Nāthamuni, whose feet are my eternal refuge in this world and even in the other;” and “Again, I bow to Nāthamuni, the best of Yogis (*yaminām*) in whom complete and ultimately true *bhaktiyoga* has descended among men, through words that are as pleasing as surging streams from the ambrosial ocean of unlimited knowledge of and devotion to Acyuta (Viṣṇu).”¹⁹¹ These passages allude to the yogic powers of Nāthamuni that consist of the ability to see into the nature of reality, knowledge, and dispassion or *vairāgya*. But they allude also to showing love (*bhakti*) for the Lord’s feet. The similarity in these images of Nāthamuni suggests that the author of the Āgama-prāmāṇya is the same as the author of the Stotratatna.

The language of respect paid to Nāthamuni is hyperbolic. He is not only the best among *yogins* but also, as Stotratatna 3 implies, an *avatāra* who has descended among men. He “possesses the highest and most complete *bhakti-yoga* that has descended (*avatīrṇa*) into the world by means of words (*vacobhiḥ*).”¹⁹² This is high praise indeed for one’s grandfather and rivals descriptions of *ācāryābhīmāna* (devotion to the Ācārya) in the works of later Ācāryas. Kūreśa and Parāśarabhaṭṭar wrote several verses about this topic. According to NAYAR, these include “(1) personal references to the Ācārya generally, and to Rāmānuja specifically, often expressive of a deep emotional bond between disciple and teacher; (2) introductory verses containing some type of *guru-paramparā* listing, either in a single verse or in several consecutive verses; and (3) two verses of Bhaṭṭar which suggest a distinct intercessory role for the Ācārya(s).”¹⁹³ Kūreśa, for instance, says “I take refuge with Rāmānuja, my revered preceptor.”¹⁹⁴ NAYAR suggests that “the Śrīvaiṣṇava understanding of the Ācārya was undoubtedly influenced by Pāñcarātra. The initial

¹⁹¹ From Stotratatna 1-3 translated by NEEVEL 1977:195.

¹⁹² NEEVEL 1977: 200.

¹⁹³ NAYAR 1992: 93.

¹⁹⁴ Kūreśa, Śrīvaikuṇṭhastava 1.

chapter of each Pāñcarātra text narrates the story of its transmission from Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa through a line of sages.”¹⁹⁵ But I think that the concept of Ācārya in Yāmuna’s work could have been inspired by Maturakaviyālvār’s description of taking refuge with Nammālvār in his Kaṇṇinuṇ Cīṛuttāmpu. There, Nammālvār is described as if he were the supreme deity himself. He destroys sins, has eternal grace, is devoted to all his followers, and saves everyone.¹⁹⁶ The hyperbolic praise of Nāthamuni is also a poetic device by which Yāmuna contrasts his own abject unworthiness with the greatness of his grandfather. In any case, the link between Yāmuna and Nāthamuni aligns with the early lineage described by Kūreṣa discussed above.

Several other important arguments favour Yāmuna’s authorship of the Āgamaprāmāṇya between the mid-eleventh century and early twelfth. NEEVEL has documented similar phrases in the Ātmasiddhi attributed to Yāmuna and the Āgamaprāmāṇya. In addition, “Rāmānuja’s first dedicatory stanza to the ŚBh [Śrībhāṣya] is clearly patterned after that of the AtS [Ātmasiddhi] and that, in the second dedicatory verse to Rāmānuja’s more independent and more sectarian work, the Vedārthasaṃgraha (VAS), Yāmuna is referred to by name and in precisely the same connection, i.e., as a protector of the true teaching against erroneous viewpoints.”¹⁹⁷ In view of these references by Rāmānuja and his reliance on Yāmuna’s summary of the Gitā, I conclude that Yāmuna lived before Rāmānuja and was the author of those works, including the Āgamaprāmāṇya, that have been attributed to him. NEEVEL thinks that Yāmuna was “building upon a long and substantial tradition that was attempting to work out a harmonization between Pāñcarātra and Vedānta.”¹⁹⁸ More specifically, this was a tradition that sought to overcome Bādarāyaṇa’s rejection of Pāñcarātra and included figures such as Dramiḍabhāṣyakāra, Śrīvatsāṅkamiśra (ca. ninth century), and Rāmamiśra, who was Yāmuna’s immediate teacher.¹⁹⁹ This seems plausible. I suggest, more-

¹⁹⁵ NAYAR 1992: 94.

¹⁹⁶ Maturakaviyālvār, Kaṇṇinuṇ Cīṛuttāmpu 7, 10, 11.

¹⁹⁷ NEEVEL 1977: 72.

¹⁹⁸ NEEVEL 1977: 74.

¹⁹⁹ See NEEVEL 1977: 73 for further evidence of this link in the works of Vedāntadeśika.

over, that this was a Vājasaneyin tradition of the Yajurveda. NEEVEL sees Rāmānuja's lineage as somewhat different, stemming from the Bodhāyanavṛtti. And this makes sense to me, too, because it puts Rāmānuja in the Taittirīya tradition, which had been particularly strong in the south, and helps me to explain his preference for the name Nārāyaṇa and his reticence in endorsing Pāñcarātra. But all this still leaves me with the problem that the Āgamaprāmāṇya does not seem to reflect that temple milieu in Tamilnadu during this period.

Before turning to the inscriptional evidence, I want to note two new elements in the works of the early Ācāryas, ones that distinguish them from the Ālṽars: devotion to the goddess Śrī and an emphasis on three Vedas rather than four. Yāmuna was the first to dedicate an entire hymn to Śrī (the Catuḥślokī). Rāmānuja, Kūreśa, and Parāśara-bhaṭṭar, too, had a special fondness for Śrī – a history that others have documented.²⁰⁰ And separate shrines to Śrī had become common by the thirteenth century.²⁰¹

Scholars have noted this departure from the Ālṽars and pointed to influence from Pāñcarātra (ritual passages) or late Vedic passages such as the Śrīsūkta,²⁰² which are found in Pāñcarātra works. But

²⁰⁰ NAYAR 1992: 222-252

²⁰¹ ORR 2000: 25.

²⁰² According to PRATAP KUMAR, Yāmuna selectively incorporated aspects of Pāñcarātra into his Vedāntin perspective. But he thinks that references to Śrī (and Lakṣmī) are found mainly in a ritual context and not in a creation context. This ritual connection is common in the Pāñcarātra texts according to KUMAR 1997: 2, 31, 52-53, 156, because the Pāñcarātrins were arguing with the Mīmāṃsakas. He suggests that Śrī might have become important only after the Lakṣmītantra, which was probably written in the twelfth century. According to NAYAR, the earliest Pāñcarātra texts refer to Śrīsūkta (Rgveda 5.87) as a *mantra* (NAYAR 1992: 23-24). CARMAN and NARAYANAN think that "This genre of hymns, directly honoring Śrī, the consort of Viṣṇu, owes more to Sanskrit models found, for instance, in the later appendices of the Vedic literature (Śrī Sūkta) as well as in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, than to earlier ālṽar works" (CARMAN/NARAYANAN 1989: 52). OBERHAMMER thinks that the influence of Śrī comes from the Purāṇas. "Den Glauben an die Göttin (Śrī, Lakṣmī), die mythologische Gattin Viṣṇus, hat es in der viṣṇuitischen Orthodoxie, in den Texten der Purāṇen überliefert, immer schon gegeben. Dies gilt auch für jene Tradition, die in der Folgezeit zur Rāmānuja-Schule werden sollte." (OBERHAMMER: 2002: 11).

RASTELLI notes that Śrī is not a major figure in early Pāñcarātra.²⁰³ I think that if some of these early Ācāryas were Vājasaneyins, then their interest in Śrī likely came from a key text for that tradition: the Vājasaneyasaṃhitā. There, Śrī and Lakṣmī are consorts of Puruṣa.²⁰⁴ Given this early Vājasaneyin reference, the importance of the Puruṣasūkta for the Vaiṣṇava tradition, and Śrī's emergence as Viṣṇu's consort during the Gupta period,²⁰⁵ Śrī must have been particularly significant for the Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Vājasaneyins. Thus, the significance of Śrī for the early Ācāryas might point to a Vājasaneyin influence.

Although we need more research, another clue to an intrusive element might be the fact that some of the early Ācāryas refer often to three Vedas instead of four. Yāmuna, for instance, mentions Garutmat "who consists of the three [Vedas]" (*trayīmaya*).²⁰⁶ Kūreśa and Parāśarabhaṭṭar refer consistently to three Vedas rather than four.²⁰⁷ If there was a change from four Vedas (the Ālvārs) to three (the Ācāryas, or at least some of them), this might indicate a change in the Brahmanical groups involved.

I turn next to inscriptional evidence that provides more information about Śrīvaiṣṇavas, *sampradāyins*, temple personal, and Brāhmaṇas associated with temples in general and Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Vājasaneyins in particular.

²⁰³ RASTELLI: personal communication. She notes that the Jayākhyasaṃhitā does not mention her at all. The Sātvatasamhitā (25.54) and the Pauṣkarasaṃhitā (42.17) mention her once, the Pārameśvarasaṃhitā three times (15.171, 188, 17.31), but the Pādmasamhitā twelve times (*kriyāpāda* 5.72, 24.53, 28.14, 29.49, 30.12, 173, *cp* 8.89, 9.126, 11.212, 217, 14.180, 15.87). It might be relevant that the latter text was partly written by Vājasaneyins.

²⁰⁴ See Vājasaneyasaṃhitā 31.22 (GONDA ²1969: 223).

²⁰⁵ KUMAR 1997: 20.

²⁰⁶ StR 41.

²⁰⁷ Kūreśa, Śrīvaikuṇṭhastava 11; 17-18; Varadarājastava 6; Sundarabāhustava 100; Parāśarabhaṭṭar, Śrīraṅgarājastava I.13.

Inscriptional Evidence

We have inscriptional references to the recitation of Nammālvār's Tiruvāymoli in the eleventh century at Uttaramerur, Ennāyiram, and Tribhuvane. We have inscriptions from the same century, moreover, that mention the general singing of hymns.²⁰⁸ Inscriptions of the twelfth century mention bronze images of the Ālvārs being worshipped in temples and taken out in processions.²⁰⁹

Only one inscription refers to the word *sampradāya*, however, and that is in a very general sense. It mentions (daily) offerings to the deity on festivals and feeding pilgrims and *sampradāyins*. *sampradāyin* can simply mean "teacher," however, one who hands down knowledge; it need not mean a sectarian teacher.²¹⁰ Given Kūreśa's references to lineage, it is striking that no inscriptions at Śrīraṅgam refer to *sampradāya*. And no inscription from the eleventh century or the twelfth refers specifically to Nāthamuni, Yāmuna, or Rāmānuja.

But some inscriptions refer explicitly to the existence of Vājasaneyins, and one refers explicitly to Mahāpāñcarātrins in the context of Vedic colleges in eleventh-century Tamilnadu. Because these reveal the connection between various Brahmanical traditions and Vaiṣṇava temples, I will examine them in some detail. By way of introduction, several features are common to these inscriptions. First, these Vedic colleges were connected with both a Vaiṣṇava temple and a *caturvedimaṅgalam* (a village of Brāhmaṇas who specialize in the four Vedas). Second, they were established by royal decree (whereas kings had little to do with most temple affairs at this time²¹¹) and were in northern Tamilnadu.²¹²

According to S.R. BALASUBRAHMANYAM, the first inscription, which "cannot be earlier than 1023 CE,"²¹³ during the reign of

²⁰⁸ See ARE 176 of 1923; ARE 333 of 1917; ARE 176 of 1919. BALASUBRAHMANYAM 1975: 155-157, 350-354.

²⁰⁹ ORR 2004a: 237.

²¹⁰ BALASUBRAHMANYAM 1975: 355 referring to ARE 202 of 1919: date lost.

²¹¹ See ORR 2000: 28-29; 67-69; 85-86; 207-208 note 53.

²¹² I thank LESLIE ORR for bringing these similarities to my attention.

²¹³ BALASUBRAHMANYAM 1975: 53 citing ARE 333 of 1917.

Rājendra I, refers to a donation by the king's order to the Aḷakiya-narasimha-perumāl temple in Ennāyiram – in what is now known as South Arcot district – by the *mahāsabha* of the Rājarāja-caturvedi-maṅgalam. This donation provided for the establishment of a Vedic college on the temple premises. More specifically, it provided support for recitation of Nammālvār's Tiruvāymoḷi in the temple, food for twenty-five Śrīvaiṣṇavas in the *maṭha* (more like a food hall than an ascetic establishment at this time²¹⁴), food for one thousand Vaiṣṇavas and Dāsas at the Āṇi-Anulam festival, expenses related to worship, food for students, support for teachers, and support for a hostel where Vedic scholars and Śrīvaiṣṇavas lived. Of interest here are the subjects taught in this Vedic college.²¹⁵ We learn that there were three teachers and seventy-five students for the Ṛgveda, three teachers and seventy-five students for the Yajurveda, one teacher and twenty students for the Chāndogya, one teacher and twenty students for the Talavakārasāma, one teacher and twenty students for the Vājasaneyana recension of the Yajurveda, one teacher and ten students for the Baudhāyāniya Gṛhya- and Kalpasūtras, and one teacher and forty students for the Rūpāvatāra (I take this word to mean expertise in making “form-incarnations” – in other words, expertise in iconography and architecture).²¹⁶

These numbers suggest that the Ṛgveda and Yajurveda were the most important texts, followed by the Sāmaveda. It is striking that the inscription refrains from mentioning any teacher for the Atharvaveda but does mention that ten students were studying it. It refrains from mentioning the Vaikhānasas, moreover, although it mentions that two other subtraditions of the Yajurveda were taught (the Vājasaneyana and the Baudhāyana, the Vājasaneyana being slightly more popular). The Atharvaveda might have been popular in earlier Tamil history, but it was now probably in decline (unless its adherents had changed their expertise to iconography and architecture). Given the prevalence of the Vaikhānasas in Tamilnadu, according to inscriptions from the ninth century to the eleventh,²¹⁷ their absence is

²¹⁴ ORR 2000: 32; ORR 2004a: 239.

²¹⁵ BALASUBRAHMANYAM 1975: 152, 156-157.

²¹⁶ According to COLAS, there were Vaiṣṇava works about architecture and iconography in the twelfth century (COLAS 1996: 63).

²¹⁷ COLAS 1996: 60-62.

difficult to explain. Perhaps they were so closely associated with the Yajurveda that they needed no separate mention. From this inscription, we know now that some orthodox Brāhmaṇas were associated with Vaiṣṇava temples, at least indirectly via Vedic colleges on their premises during the eleventh century, and that some of these were Vājasaneyin Brāhmaṇas. But we do not know if the latter were also temple priests. And who were the Śrīvaiṣṇavas who are distinguished from Vedic scholars yet lived in the same hostel? They must have played some daily key role in the temple such as singing hymns or making offerings.

The word *śrīvaiṣṇava* might have originally referred simply to the good, or holy, Vaiṣṇavas; *śrī* or *tiru* (its Prakrit equivalent) is a common honorific adjective, as in Tirupati, the auspicious, or holy, place.²¹⁸ Inscriptional references from the eleventh century refer generally to holy workers (*tevarkanmikaḷ* from *devakarman*: therefore workers of the god) or to performers of sacred work (*śrīkāriyam ceyvār*) in temples²¹⁹ but not to priests. If they refer to functions, these include hymn-singers, gardeners, and garland makers. They indicate also that temple management was in the hands of the Brāhmaṇa *sabhai*. The word *śrīvaiṣṇava* appears in inscriptions as the name of a sectarian group along with the Vaikhānasa, Śivabrāhmaṇas, and Śrīmaheśvaras (devotees of Śiva). But, says ORR, this became more

²¹⁸ According to ORR: personal communication, “the very earliest inscriptions (late ninth century to early tenth) conclude with the expression ‘*itu vaiṣṇava rakṣai*’ (may the Vaiṣṇavas protect this [grant] (SII 24.1,2,4). But by the second half of the tenth century, the phrase ‘*itu śrīvaiṣṇava rakṣai*’ began to appear (SII 24.11,12). This becomes standard in the eleventh century and onward. At Tirupati, inscriptions from the tenth century (TDI 1.8) and the eleventh (e.g. TDI 1.19) include this expression. But this does not necessarily mean that there was an organized group whose members regard themselves as ‘Śrīvaiṣṇavas’ in some specifically sectarian sense. I would expect that *śrīvaiṣṇava* in this expression means ‘devotees of Viṣṇu’ in quite a loose sense; the expression finds its exact parallel in Śaiva temples – ‘*itu panmaheśvara rakṣai*’ – when *panmaheśvara* certainly does not correspond to any particular group. I do not read anything more into the prefixing of *śrī* to *vaiṣṇava*, in this case, than into the addition of *pan* (from *pal* = ‘many’) to *maheśvara*, to produce the meaning ‘all the devotees of Śiva.’”

²¹⁹ ORR 2004a: 232.

common in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when references to the *śrīvaiṣṇava* committee (*vāriyam*) and *śrīvaiṣṇava* supervisors (*kaṅkāṇi*) also increased.²²⁰

We have several similar eleventh-century inscriptions. One,²²¹ dated 1048, during the reign of Rājādhirāja I, was located in Tribhuvane (now in the territory of Pondicherry). The gift was made by a general to secure the health of Rājendra Cōla I and was executed by the *mahāsabha*. It provided for temple worship, festivals, feeding Śrīvaiṣṇavas, and supporting reciters of Nammālvār's Tiruvāymoli, Vedic teachers, and their students. The latter consisted of three teachers and sixty students for the Ṛgveda, three teachers and sixty students for the Yajurveda, one teacher and twenty students for the Chāndogyaśāma, and one teacher and a total of one hundred twenty students for the following: the Talavakārasāma, Apūrva, Vājasaneyā, Baudhāyanīya, and Styāṣṭa(adha)sūtras, Vedānta, Vyākaraṇa, Rūpāvatāra, Rāmāyaṇa, [Mahā]Bhārata, Manuśāstra, and Vaikhānasaśāstra. Again, the list does not refer to the Atharvaveda. But it does refer explicitly to the three branches of the Yajurveda – Vājasaneyā, Vaikhānasa, and Taittirīya (Baudhāyanīya) along with the Ṛgveda and Sāmaveda.

Finally, an inscription²²² at Tirumukkūṭal (in modern Chingleput district), dated 1069, during the reign of Vīra Rājendra Cōla, provided for temple worship; festivals; offerings on the king's birthday; feeding Śrīvaiṣṇavas on festivals; supporting singers of the Tiruvāymoli, cultivators of flower gardens, Vaikhānasa *tevakaṇmikaḷ*, and other temple personal; and providing for a Vedic college with an attached hostel and hospital, all of which were within one structure. This college was considerably smaller than those mentioned in the other inscriptions, having only one teacher and ten students for the Ṛgveda, one teacher and ten students for the Yajurveda, and one teacher (*bhaṭṭa*) and twenty students to explain Vyākaraṇa and Rūpāvatāra. In addition, there were ten Mahāpāñcarātrin students along with three Śivabrāhmaṇas, five Vaikhānasas, and two others (details have been effaced) in the hostel. The inscription does not mention

²²⁰ ORR 1995: 115-118; 123.

²²¹ ARE 176 of 1919 cited by BALASUBRAHMANYAM 1975: 350; 354.

²²² EI 21.38 cited by BALASUBRAHMANYAM 1975: 367-371.

their teachers; some Vedic scholars, presumably, had sectarian affiliations. The Mahāpāñcarātrins were likely Brāhmaṇas, because they were attending a Vedic college. The word *mahāpāñcarātrin* (“great” Pāñcarātrin) reminds me once again of the Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas or Vājasaneyins of the Āgama-prāmāṇya, who were identified with the Pāñcarātra tradition but saw themselves as a distinct and superior group. But we do not know whether these Mahāpāñcarātrins went on to become temple priests or were just Brahmanical textual experts.

Unlike the arguments presented by the author of the Āgama-prāmāṇya to defend the orthodox status of Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas against Smārtas (Mīmāṃsakas, Naiyāyikas, Vedāntins), these three inscriptions portray southern Vedic and sectarian identities as harmonious. Various kinds of orthodox Brāhmaṇa and sectarians taught at one Vedic college, and their subjects were viewed as textual specializations rather than doctrines of competing views. Vaidika or Brāhmaṇa identity was central, not sectarian identity. Even Śiva-brāhmaṇas went to one Vedic school that was attached to a Vaiṣṇava temple. This is quite different from the obvious rivalry between the Ālvārs and Nāyanmārs of the previous period, which must have subsided, and the temple personal and sectarian rivalries (Pāñcarātrin/Vaikhānasa) of later periods in Tamilnadu.

Why were all these Vedic colleges connected with Vaiṣṇava temples? Perhaps because of royal requests. They were all located in northern Tamilnadu on the border with rival kingdoms. Because the deity of two temples was the fierce Narasiṃha, kings might have wanted Brāhmaṇa establishments to create buffer zones – thinking that invaders would leave Brāhmaṇa villages alone. To entice Brāhmaṇas there, kings might have promised them not only lands but Vedic colleges as well. Because orthodox Brāhmaṇas of various types had had long associations with Vaiṣṇava temples in Tamilnadu – see my discussion in this essay of Atharvavedic, Ṛgvedic, and Yajurvedic texts and traditions with home and temple worship from the fourth century – kings likely saw no real clash between temple and Brahmanical perspectives. Vedic colleges associated with Vaiṣṇava temples were among the results.

To me, this Brahmanical solidarity and harmony indicate a tradition of Brahmanical temple worship that must have been deeply embedded in the Tamil milieu (although some new groups, such as Vājasaneyins, might have been integrating themselves into it. We

have no evidence of a large, recently arrived group of sectarians, such as Pāñcarātrins, who gained the right to be temple priests by royal decree or took over control of temple rituals on a large scale. And even though these colleges were established by royal decrees, inscriptions do not indicate that kings were importing northern Brāhmaṇas to teach Vedic subjects in the temples.

Three important inscriptions at Śrīraṅgam allude to the role of temple personnel in the thirteenth century. In 1225, says ORR, “We find a first reference to another group, the *bhaṭṭar* – whom we assume are Brāhmaṇas since they are residents of the temple’s Brāhmaṇ settlement (*akaram*) – who are party to an agreement about revising the method of selecting *śrīvaiṣṇavas* to serve in the temple (SII 24.292) ... This inscription also mentions several types of temple authorities whom we have never heard of previously in the inscriptions, including Śrībhāgavata *nampis*, hymn-singing (*vinṇappaṇṇayum*) *nampis*, *āriyar* of the holy gate (*tiruvācal*), and *jīyar*. None of these, except for the *jīyar*, is named.”²²³

The reference to Śrībhāgavata *nampi* is relevant here. The word *nampi* had several meanings. According to ORR, it occurs in 274 inscriptions at Śrīraṅgam; it often refers to Śrīvaiṣṇavas in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, but “is also found as an element in the names of gardeners, members of treasury committees and *sabhais*, *bhaṭṭar*, shepherds, and merchants. As was the case for the name Bhaṭṭar, this name is clearly not borne exclusively by members of any particular group...”²²⁴ She concludes: “[t]he absence of emphasis on caste status in the inscriptions is very consistent and very striking.”²²⁵ But *nampi* can mean something more specific, such as priest. The words Śrībhāgavata *nampi* could refer to Vājasaneyin Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇas. Therefore, this might be our first explicit reference to Pāñcarātrin priests in a temple. Still, it is odd to find only one inscription in Tamil Vaiṣṇava temples that mentions consecrating the image (*pratiṣṭhā*),²²⁶ a common activity of Pāñcarātra priests. It is odd, moreover, that the inscriptions describe donors as causing dei-

²²³ ORR 1995: 121.

²²⁴ ORR 1995: 127.

²²⁵ ORR 1995: 128.

²²⁶ ORR 2004b: 460.

ties to appear (*eḷuntaru*) graciously in image form.²²⁷ This is in keeping with the Ālvār language of spontaneity and Rāmānuja's theology of the *arcā* as God's response to the devotee's desire for a particular form.

This first inscriptional reference to *araiyar* (one who sings the Ālvār hymns accompanied by interpretive gestures) is significant, because hagiographies attribute the founding of the tradition of *araiyar* to Nāthamuni. If it had been in existence since his time, why do we have no references to it in inscriptions and texts? The word *jīyar*, too, is interesting, because we have no inscriptional references to *jīyars* from the time of Rāmānuja. And the ones that we have from the thirteenth century refer to servants (*dāsa*), not heads, of ascetic groups.²²⁸ And yet the hagiographies would have us believe that Nāthamuni, Yāmuna, and Rāmānuja were great ascetics. ORR notes the following: "There are two inscriptions of the mid or later thirteenth century ... which resemble the inscription of 1225 inasmuch as they indicate the reorganization of temple personnel ... These two inscriptions refer to the *āriyar*, but not to *nampis* or *jīyar*. Instead, according to these inscriptions, the managing committee of the temple included representatives from, among other groups, *kovaṇavar* ('loin-cloth wearers'), *kuṭavar* ('those of the water pot?'), *talaiyiṭuvār* ('those who present leaves'), *rāmānuja uṭaiyār* ('keepers of Rāmānuja'), *akampaṭiyār* ('those who serve within'), *pāṭuvār* ('singers?'), and *totavatti tūmaraiyār* ('those of the clean clothes and pure Veda')."²²⁹

Several of these categories interest me. The term *rāmānuja uṭaiyār* (literally, possessors of Rāmānuja) might refer to the priests of a shrine at Śrīraṅgam, which housed an image of Rāmānuja.²³⁰

²²⁷ ORR 2004b: 460.

²²⁸ ORR 2004a: 249; YOUNG 1995: 223-226.

²²⁹ ORR 1995: 122 citing SII 24.203 and SII 24.257.

²³⁰ It has been claimed that an inscription dated 1191 (641 of 1191) refers to an image of Rāmānuja in the Kāñcī temple (NAYAR 1992: 103 note 39 citing RAMAN 1975: 167). But ORR (personal communication) has challenged RAMAN's claim, saying that the reference is very vague. Extrapolating from a line in Parāśarabhaṭṭar's Śrīraṅgarājastava I.48 – "Let me circumambulate [the Inner Sanctum of the temple], having taken refuge in the series of glances [emanating from my] Gurus who are seated on the

And the word *akampaṭiyār*,²³¹ (“those who serve [alternatively, chant/sing] inside,” presumably in the sanctum), might refer to priests of some kind.

ORR notes that we have references to only one of these groups, the twelfth-century *kovaṇavar*. And even between 1280 and 1344, we have only one or two inscriptions for each group.²³² So Śrībhāgavata *nampis* (if indeed they were the Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Pāñcarātra temple priests), presumably mentioned by the 1225 inscription, might not have been prevalent in the temples of Tamilnadu until after the fourteenth century. Or they had a low profile as simply one group that served within the temple. And neither the *araiyars* (singers of hymns) nor the *jīyars* (ascetics) were prevalent. According to ORR, “three quarters of the inscriptions of the last sub-period [1280-1344] concern the donation of land by various people (including a number of *dāsanampis*, and people who themselves bore the name Bhaṭṭar) to *bhaṭṭar* who had been settled in several *brahmadeyas* at Śrīraṅgam through the sponsorship of a local chief named Kalingarayan and the Pandya king Jatavarman Sundara III. Most of the inscriptions refer to the *bhaṭṭar* simply as a group ... These inscriptions mark a significant change in the distribution of land among members of the community at Śrīraṅgam. While there had been a Brāhmaṇ settlement at Śrīraṅgam from the time of the earliest extant inscriptions, as we know from the references throughout the early medieval period to the *sabhai*, it is only at the end of this period that we find evidence of massive Brāhmaṇ landholdings around the temple. Whereas in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries land was granted – typically for flower gardens – to *śrīvaiṣṇavas* and *dāsanampis*, in the fourteenth century *śrīvaiṣṇavas* and *dāsanampis* were not recipients but were rather donors of land.”²³³

Some of these *bhaṭṭars*, who were responsible for reciting Veda and Purāṇa, practicing medicine (*vaidya*), and performing sacrifices (*yajña*), might not have been involved with temple ritual, says

Blessed Lord’s left side ...” – NAYAR thinks that images of the Ācāryas existed at the time of Bhaṭṭar (NAYAR 1992: 97).

²³¹ ORR 1995: 122.

²³² ORR 1995: 122.

²³³ ORR 1995: 123.

ORR. But the inscriptions describe other *bhaṭṭars* as providing “offerings and other services to deities, or as receiving portions of the food prepared in the temple. The appearance in such force of these *bhaṭṭar* at Śrīraṅgam in the last years of the early medieval period, with their claims to lands, their specialized Brahmanical skills, and their connection with temple affairs, is likely to have had a decisive influence on the subsequent evolution of the Vaiṣṇava community at Śrīraṅgam.”²³⁴

We do not know what kind of Brāhmaṇas these *bhaṭṭars* were. But we do know that, by the fourteenth century, the *bhaṭṭars* were taking over from the *śrīvaiṣṇavas* in temple management.²³⁵ And we do know that conservatism was simultaneously affecting Śrīvaiṣṇavism; visible in works by Vedāntadeśika,²³⁶ and provoking reactions by Maṇavālamūnī.

Some of these *bhaṭṭars* were Smārtas. They considered themselves more orthodox than those belonging to the Tamil temple traditions, including the Vājasaneyin Śrībhāgavata Brāhmaṇa *nampis*, who had integrated into the southern temple tradition. This could have led to tensions among temple personnel. And it could have led to new worries about hierarchy (caste and sub-caste), which threatened the old egalitarian ethos of Tamil Vaiṣṇavism. The hagiographies mention that problem. In this new and competitive climate, it would have made sense to legitimate equality by attributing it to an early figure, for instance, attributing the idea that the *tirumantra* should be given to every devotee to Rāmānuja,²³⁷ and so forth.

Even though we still have no concrete evidence of an established Pāñcarātra priesthood in the temples of Tamilnadu, therefore, one hypothesis is worthy of consideration. Over several centuries (inscriptions suggest that this began in the eleventh century), there was enough Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Vājasaneyin influence, which had some connection with Pāñcarātra, to facilitate the gradual development of an interest in Pāñcarātra texts by the Ācāryas and some low-keyed participation by Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Vājasaneyins in temple

²³⁴ ORR 1995: 124.

²³⁵ ORR 1995: 115-118; 123.

²³⁶ YOUNG 1995: 181.

²³⁷ YOUNG 1995: 207-208.

ritual. The inscriptional reference to Śrībhāgavata *nampis* in the inscription of 1225 is a case in point. With the entrance to areas surrounding major temples of another Smārta type of Brahmanical group, generally called *bhaṭṭars*, tensions likely grew among temple personal. This was probably true of the Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Vājasaneyins, for instance, who were involved in temple ritual. By the time of the Kōyil-oluku, which can be dated any time between the fifteenth century and the eighteenth, there were attempts to legitimate this Pāñcarātra priesthood by attributing it to Rāmānuja.²³⁸ And these might have increased tensions between Pāñcarātrins and Vaikhānasas, a sectarian tension that was occurring throughout the subcontinent.²³⁹ Before this picture is complete, though, we need a study of

²³⁸ ORR 1995: 121.

²³⁹ Two Vaikhānasa works, which could be dated as late as the eighteenth century, reflect these tensions. The Ānandasamhitā refers to three branches of the Yajurveda: the pure Vaikhānasa, the impure Taittirīya, and the pure Vājasaneyaka (Ānandasamhitā II.74-77; cited by COLAS 1996: 160). Each of these has many subdivisions, with the Vaikhānasa having the most (fifty-nine) and the Vājasaneyaka having the fewest (fourteen). The Ānandasamhitā puts the Pāñcarātra into a list of six sects: Buddhist, Jaina, Śaiva, Pāsupata, Kāpāla, and Pāñcarātra (COLAS 1996: 164). The Ādisamhitā says much the same thing, providing details about these groups (Ādisamhitā II.49-50; cited by COLAS 1996: 161). It purportedly shows the late Vedic world, says COLAS, but he suggests that this view might be artificial and anachronistic. One section (Ādisamhitā III.4-17; cited by COLAS 1996: 162) describes the Vaiṣṇavas as the Vaikhānasa, Sātvata (Pāñcarātra; Ekāyana), Tīrthaka, Ekāntika and Mūlaka. Pāñcarātra is further divided into either two categories – pure (*śuddha*) or mixed (*miśra*) – or three – Bhakta, Bhāgavata and Pāñcarātra. According to COLAS, this resembles a list in the Viṣṇusamhitā (Viṣṇusamhitā 2.26-33; cited by COLAS 1996: 162 and note 4). Lists such as these suggest that we are dealing with a pan-Indian profile, which need not have reflected a precise situation on the ground in Tamilnadu. This makes my historical reconstruction of the relation among Brāhmaṇas, Pāñcarātrins, and the formation of Śrīvaiṣṇavism especially difficult.

Classifying Pāñcarātra with the heterodox sects was obviously a put-down by the Vaikhānasas. The Vaikhānasa, says the Ānandasamhitā, is the cult for cities and villages, royal palaces, and private houses, especially those of Brāhmaṇas; those Brāhmaṇas with right expertise (*adhikāra*) were born Vaikhānasa and have received the rituals of the Vaikhānasasūtra. By contrast, the Pāñcarātra is called *tāntrika*, secondary (*gauṇa*), and cruel (*āg-*

inscriptional evidence between the fifteenth century and the twentieth. That is likely the period when Pāñcarātra became institutionalized in some Vaiṣṇava temples of Tamilnadu (although to this day, as I said, there are more Vaikhānas temples than Pāñcarātra ones in the list of the 108 *divyadeśas*).

Listen to K. RANGACHARI on the early twentieth century: “Amongst Sri Vaishnavas God is worshipped in two different ways. One way is worshipping God in one’s own house and it is called Svārthayajanam. This domestic worship of God or Svārthayajanam has already been described under Panchakāla observances of an orthodox Sri Vaishnava Brahman. The other method of worship or Parārthayajanam is meant for all people. This is the form of worship that is usually adopted in all temples. All the temple rituals ... have all to be carried out by men especially trained or initiated for these purposes. These men constitute the Archakas or Bhaṭṭar Sri Vaishnavas”²⁴⁰ even though any kind of Brāhmaṇa may do the Pāñcarātra style of domestic worship, says RANGACHARI, but only those who have had *dīkṣā* should perform temple worship (although the priests [*arcakas*] following the *sūtras* of Bodhāyana and Śaunaka may do so as well). *arcakas* of the Bodhāyana and Śaunaka Sūtras are usually initiated, though, having *dīkṣā* instead of *prapatti*.²⁴¹ RANGACHARI’s description follows in many ways the description of the Pāñcarātra priests in the Āgamaprāmāṇya and that of pan-Indian texts as well. But there was one difference. Those who did temple ritual were now considered inferior to the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas, and these groups no longer intermarried. It is interesting that RANGACHARI does not mention the Vaikhānasa in this context.

neya). It must not be practiced in the homes of Brāhmaṇas but only by ascetics in remote places for liberation. As sectarian tension increased, all the old stereotypes were reintroduced. We are told that the Bodhāyana tradition from the Black Yajurveda is wild (*krūra*) and the Kātyāyana (Vājasaneyana) is *tāmasa*. Despite these putdowns, the Vaikhānasas sometimes accepted assistant priests from these circles (COLAS 1996: 62-63).

²⁴⁰ RANGACHARI 1931: 99.

²⁴¹ RANGACHARI 1931: 101.

CONCLUSION

According to GERHARD OBERHAMMER's essay in this volume, a Vaiṣṇava orthodoxy – “a religious and philosophical tradition that was bound to its Vedic origin, that was moulded by a Brahmanic style of thinking and living, and that manifested itself by the Brahmanic ritual ... [and that] had to a great extent already become monotheistic ... was probably ... the seed of the religious movement of the Ālvārs,”²⁴² and the later Śrīvaiṣṇavas. “These religious and theological aspects can also not be traced back to the Pāñcarātra,” says OBERHAMMER, “but rather point to an independent stream of tradition.”²⁴³ OBERHAMMER points to the Taittirīya tradition, the Puruṣasūkta in the Ṛgvidhāna, and the Mahānārāyaṇopaniṣad to show how this stream was absorbed into Viśiṣṭādvaita and Pāñcarātra texts. I think that this independent stream emerged mainly from the Yajurveda but also that it was linked with the Atharvaveda and Puruṣasūkta traditions in South India. As I have shown, this stream emphasized the spirituality of taking refuge with God (called *śaraṇāgati* in the later Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition), a *bhakti* spirituality, a lamentation of life within *samsāra*, expressions of humility, and reinterpretations of asceticism. From the research presented here, I concur with OBERHAMMER's general historical reconstruction, but I think that there were several influences on the Ālvārs.

More specifically, I think that several Brahmanical traditions connected with Nārāyaṇa contributed to an evolving Brahmanical tradition in Tamilnadu. The early ones were mainly Atharvavedins and Yajurvedins (Taittirīya and Vaikhānasa branches), both of which were prominent in South India, but perhaps some Ṛgvedins too. Their religiosity combined the following: taking refuge with the deity; chanting *stotras* (such as the Puruṣasūkta) and divine names; and meditating with deep devotion on a mental image or worshipping a physical one in connection with *homa* or with *pūjā* in a home shrine (or temple), and adopting an ascetic lifestyle as a householder or *vānaprasthin*. The Atharvavedins were entrepreneurial southern Brāhmaṇas, working hard to synthesize ascetic, Vedic, and popular religiosity. They had close relations with other southern Brāhmaṇas,

²⁴² See pp. 37f. in this volume.

²⁴³ See p. 38 in this volume.

which contributed to the emergence of a Vaidika devotional religiosity that focused on creating an image of the supreme deity and making him present through imagination or ritual.

Added to this mix, I suggest, was a community that originated in the Deccan, perhaps initiated by branches of these same Brahmanical groups (although the texts say nothing about that). This community integrated aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhism with a robust, exclusively monotheistic Nārāyaṇa cult, albeit one that included the *avatāras* and local deities as many forms of the one God. This community emerged out of competition with Buddhists, Jainas, and Śaivas as a proselytizing and therefore competitive sect. It entered Tamilnadu (along with a similar Śaiva group) because of migrations that began in the third century and proselytism that began in the sixth. At the same time, new groups such as Digambara Jainas and some Buddhist sects entered Tamilnadu and might have won the favour of several Tamil rulers. Because their rights had been abrogated on several occasions by these newcomers (or they feared that they would be), Tamil Brāhmaṇas looked for a way to stem the tide. Some of them joined forces with the new proselytizing sectarian group, knowing that they had to broaden their cause by appealing to Tamils across a broad section of society. Already familiar with Tamil poetic literature, they helped rework the *akam* and *puram* genres of classical Tamil poetry (*caṅkam*) – especially motifs that praised Tamil language, region, and culture – into a compelling new *Tamil bhakti* framework. They urged everyone to join the movement and protect both Tamil and Vedic traditions. This was part of a larger Pan-Indian “Brahmanical/Hindu” revival, which had been underway since the Śuṅga dynasty in other parts of the subcontinent. Even though southern Brāhmaṇas made a major contribution to the *bhakti* movement, which is my thesis here, it is important not to reduce this complex movement, one that integrated many Tamil communities, to a purely Brahmanical phenomenon. This aspect of the complexity is beyond the scope of my essay, however, which has focused on Brāhmaṇas and Pāñcarātrins.

By at least the eleventh century, some Vājasaneyins were established at Vedic colleges in Tamilnadu²⁴⁴ and probably elsewhere.

²⁴⁴ SINGH points out that Orissan inscriptions include many references to Yajurvedins and especially Vājasaneyins between the fourth century and

Their erudition, their references to the three Vedas, and their Śrī connection – which is prominent neither in the southern Brahmanical texts of the fourth to sixth centuries nor in the Ālvār hymns – point to this new element. These Vājasaneyins had integrated bhaktic and yogic traditions as had other branches of the Yajurveda tradition. Nāthamuni might have belonged to this tradition, to judge from Yāmuna’s description of him as a great *bhakta*, a *yogin*, and a learned person.

Some in these Vājasaneyin circles belonged also to a Vedānta school that sought to integrate it with Pāñcarātra in the tradition of Dramiḍabhāṣyakara and Śrīvatsāṅkamiśra. This was the case of Rāmamiśra, who seems to have been the teacher of Yāmuna and perhaps (according to some hagiographies) a disciple of Nāthamuni. Because this defense had been developing over many centuries, we can assume that its history, including its many debates with Smārtas, would have been known to those in the lineage throughout the sub-continent (that is, wherever this Vājasaneyin tradition had spread). I assume that, when Yāmuna wrote his Āgamaprāmāṇya in the late eleventh or early twelfth century, he drew on these well-known debates as passed on orally by Rāmamiśra (perhaps drawing on the Treatise on the Validity of the Kāśmīrāgama). In other words, he could have written his Āgamaprāmāṇya without any specific reference to temple life in Tamilnadu at the time. Thus, we need not assume any actual conflict between Smārtas and Vājasaneyins in Tamilnadu at the time for that to have occurred. This analysis helps me to account for the discrepancy between the Āgamaprāmāṇya’s description of a temple milieu (competition and hierarchy verging on animosity),²⁴⁵ which might have drawn from Kashmiri or other pan-

the tenth. The Vājasaneyins often had royal patrons. They were not connected with temples (SINGH 1994: 138-139; 181-183; 292-293).

²⁴⁵ Yāmuna, who attributes the inspiration to Nāthamuni, says: “May, for the length of this Aeon, play on the pious, enchanting and irreproachable sayings of the extensive collection of prose and verse compositions which eclipse the cleverness of the befuddled, conceited and witless assembly of the evil crowd of the rivals of the Sātvata doctrine, whose spirit has been increased by the glorious Nāthamunīndra, and by which all the unholy powers are cleansed” (Āgamaprāmāṇya 139 translated by VAN BUITENEN 1971: 122).

Indian sources, and what inscriptions or other texts reveal about the interaction of Brāhmaṇas, temple personal, and sectarians in Tamilnadu at the end of the thirteenth century (cooperation and harmony under the rubric of service and holy work).

Despite the Āgamaprāmāṇya's rhetorical flourishes of combativeness, early Bhāgavata Brāhmaṇa Vājasaneyins probably integrated without fuss into the prevailing Tamil temple culture. As disciples of a Yajurveda tradition, many Yajurvedins would have had some affinity with other long-standing Yajurveda traditions in Tamilnadu, especially the Vaikhānasa, which belonged as well to the White Yajurveda. From 1225, for instance, we have a brief reference to Śrībhāgavata *nampis* at Śrīraṅgam. They might have been priests, but they probably belonged to only one among several groups in temple service. And we hear nothing about their *dikṣā* or about worship five times daily (*pāñcakālīka*) by royal decree as described in the Āgamaprāmāṇya, Pāñcarātra-Āgamas, or sectarian classifications found in other texts. But because inscriptions mention offerings and festivals, too, I assume that they were involved in some ritual activities even though the identity of officiants is hidden by the general nomenclature: Śrīvaiṣṇava, holy worker, and *nampi*. These words allude to various groups, which serve in several capacities. This description reminds me of Ālvār religion: service, the community of devotees, equality, and the diagnostic features that I identified at the beginning of this chapter. We have only one reference to the consecration of an image (*pratiṣṭhā*) but many to donors (ordinary devotees) making the deity "appear" or rise up. That, too, suggests continuity in the religious idiom.

By the fourteenth century, however, the status quo might have been disturbed by the arrival of another Brahmanical group (or several), generally known as *bhaṭṭars*, who pulled rank as more orthodox. Increasing hierarchy and competition over temple honours and rights explain the rise of charter myths in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century hagiographies, which legitimated families or groups by association with early Ācāryas. In the Kōyil-oḷuku, the Śrībhāgavata *nampis* legitimated their temple role as priests by association with Rāmānuja. With this development, the Pāñcarātrins must have become more firmly established in many Vaiṣṇava temples of Tamilnadu.

